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MATTHEW ARNOLD'S

MEROPE

TO WHICH IS APPENDED

THE ELECTRA OF SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT WHITELAW

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

This volume is an experiment. It is an attempt to introduce and to bring home to modern readers who are not Greek scholars, Attic tragedy in its most perfect form, and in all its characteristics of theme, structure, sentiment, and style. It is an attempt to do in another way what Arnold himself attempted to do when he composed the drama which is here edited—and edited with the best of commentaries, namely, a close and faithful version of the tragedy of which his work is the English counterpart. The 'unlearned' reader may thus compare the original—for the version which we are here privileged to reproduce very exactly recalls it—and the copy, and in this way be brought as nearly as it is possible for a reader without Greek to be brought into touch with the only dramatic masterpieces comparable to our own Shakespeare's.

More and more are we beginning to understand that advanced education, on the side at least of the humanities, and particularly of poetry, of criticism, and of many branches of philosophy, must have its basis in the poetry, criticism, and philosophy of ancient Greece, partly because so much of our own is apart from them historically unintelligible, and partly because they supply needs which the rapidly progressive dissolution of all conventionalities and traditions are increasingly creating and defining. We see this every-

where. We see it in the success of such works as Jowett's Plato, Long's Marcus Aurelius, Messrs. Butcher and Lang's *Odyssey*, and in the appearance of the innumerable works which have, either in the form of translations or popular monographs, been aiming more or less successfully during the last twelve or fifteen years at popularizing Greek literature on almost all its sides. Perhaps no more striking illustration of this could be given than the recent revival of Greek dramas on the modern stage and the popularity of such experiments.

No one, indeed, is likely to dispute that some knowledge of the masterpieces of Greek literature is indispensable to every one who has any pretension to liberal culture, and that if a knowledge of the original language—the difficulty of which has been very greatly and unnecessarily increased by our stupid and inefficient methods of teaching it—exacts too much time and labour, we must be satisfied with the second best. And the second best is good : in philosophy and criticism very much indeed may be done through good translations, especially if some rudimentary knowledge of the original language be possessed. In poetry, for obvious reasons, the reader who has little or no Greek is at a much greater disadvantage. But even here a translation if excellent may, in some measure, and even in large measure, compensate what is lost by inability to appreciate the original ; and the greater the poetry—for in great poetry much lies in what is not lost through translation—the less does it suffer in finding expression in another language. Our own Bible is an example ; and what translation into English has there

done for the Book of Job, for Isaiah, and for Ezekiel, translation into English can almost do for the Homeric poems, for the Greek dramatists, if we except the Choruses, and, at the sacrifice of his music, for Pindar. And this may be said with confidence : whoever will read *Merope*, and side by side with it the version of the *Electra* here printed, will, so far as Sophocles is concerned, have come as near to him as nine-tenths of those who study him in the original.

The present volume has been designed for two classes of readers, for the general reader who may wish to know in detail and with exactness what typical Greek tragedies were like, or who with some knowledge of Greek may be interested in the questions dealt with in the Introduction and Notes, and for students in schools and other educational institutions where Greek is or is not taught. For this reason *Merope* has been somewhat elaborately annotated in the hope that it may be studied with the same care and thoroughness that textbooks prescribed for examinations necessarily are. Considering how largely Greek traditions and associations, both generally and especially in relation to its mythology, enter into the works of our own classics, and the acknowledged importance of Greek literature as an element in liberal education, there is surely no reason why translations of classical excellence should not have a place among the textbooks in our curricula.

I have thought that for several reasons it might be well to give illustrations and parallels in the original, but literal prose translations are always given with them. Nothing likely to cause difficulty to a non-classical reader has been

left unexplained, and there is much, therefore, both in the Introductions and in the Notes, which will be superfluous to all other readers. To the *Electra*, as it is here given only collaterally and as illustrative, only a short introduction has been prefixed, and the few notes are confined to the explanation of mythological allusions.

It remains for me to thank Mr. Whitelaw and his publishers, Messrs. Longmans, for permission to include his version of the *Electra*, corrected by himself, taken from his translation of the complete plays of Sophocles, and Messrs. Macmillan for permission to print *Merope* from the author's latest revised text.

J. C. C.

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INTRODUCTION

I

Matthew Arnold's *Merope* is an attempt to transplant into English Literature and, if possible, to naturalize in it a creation which is not only peculiarly characteristic of the genius and temper of the ancient Greeks, but which is undoubtedly their capital achievement in art—Attic tragedy: and such is the power, the charm, the fascination of its masterpieces that a modern poet who has felt their spell may be excused for forgetting in his enthusiasm that what blooms, unforced and native in its own soil, may become a mere exotic in another.

If we except the Epinikian Odes of Pindar, nothing that the Greeks have left us sprang so directly out of the very peculiar conditions of their social and political life, or developed and matured itself so essentially and indissolubly in connexion with those conditions, as their drama. Originating in the country out of the rude Chorus to Dionysus chanted round a turf altar, as the blood of a slaughtered goat streamed over the flowers and fruit heaped upon it, it here, at a very early stage, presented in embryo all that formally distinguished it in its maturest expression, and received impressions which it retained to the last. Out of that portion of the dithyramb or song to Dionysus which, divided between the leader and the member of the Chorus appointed to answer him, related dramatically some incident in the career of the god, sprang plot and dialogue: out of the sympathetic expressions and comments of the general body of the singers of the dithyramb sprang one of the distinguishing features of Attic tragedy, the Chorus. The subordination of the Choric element to the dialogue was indeed all that was wanted to complete its formal development, and this was effected by the introduction of a second actor by Aeschylus; Alcman, Stesichorus, and Arion having already regulated and organized the Choral Song. When it became

all that the genius of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and their schools and followers successively made it, it retained, however modified, its primitive characteristics and was never severed from its old associations. The village revelling-place was exchanged for the Theatre of Dionysus ; the turf altar became a marble 'thymele'; the elevation from which the rude dialogue was exchanged between the Coryphaeus and the Hypocrites was now the 'logeion' on a stately stage ; and the sward around, on which the old revellers danced and sang, a noble orchestra. But it was the expression of the same homage at the same seasons to the same deity. Its exhibition was confined to three out of the four Dionysian festivals—the Lesser Dionysia in December, the Lenaea or Feast of the Wine-press in January, and the Greater Dionysia in March. Its tutelary deity was the deity in whose worship it originated ; to his priest the place of honour in the auditorium was assigned ; in his presence, symbolized by the image which was solemnly escorted from its sanctuary at the foot of the Acropolis to the Theatre on the first day of the performances and placed in the orchestra, it was acted.

Thus the Greek drama was as intimately associated with the cult of this god as our own early liturgical drama with the ceremony and sentiment of Catholic Christianity ; but with this difference, it never, unlike our own drama, cast off its old shackles and pursued an independent course. Even when for the adventures of Dionysus it substituted all the wealth of mythological and historical tradition, and the god himself receded comparatively into the background, it still remained purely liturgical. In its machinery half the Pantheon of the popular creeds had either actively or passively a part. Its exhibition was as essentially a factor in the state religion as the public sacrifices, and the Theatre of Dionysus was a temple as sacred as any temple in Hellas. So conservative was the temper of the Greeks as a body, with such tenacity did they cling to the superstitions of their forefathers, that even the broad and profound intelligence of such a poet and thinker as Sophocles could not break from the shackles imposed by the vulgar creeds. It was under these limitations, and these limitations rigidly imposed, that the artists of a drama which, as a representation of human character and a mirror of life, was

to remain unrivalled for more than two thousand years, were compelled to work.

All this would alone suffice to show that the Greek drama, and more especially tragedy, was the peculiar and characteristic product of social and political conditions and of all that such conditions involve and imply which have no analogy in modern times, and that consequently its reproduction in exact counterpart must necessarily be an anachronism in art. And this is what Matthew Arnold's predecessors in such an attempt have apparently felt. Milton, indeed, in *Samson Agonistes* has reproduced with rigid fidelity its form, and has succeeded in showing how that form may become, even for modern art, legitimately and effectively a model; he has reproduced also—though this is scarcely a differentiating characteristic—its aesthetic and moral effect. But he reproduces nothing else. All that vitalizes his work is what is implicit in its theme and in what its theme presents in symbol. Hebraic in its associations, it is Hebraic in its inspiration. In Milton himself the temper of the Hebrew very greatly predominated over the temper of the Greek. When he drew Samson he drew himself, for in Samson's position and destiny he realized a tragedy analogous to the tragedy of his own life. It is this which makes *Samson Agonistes* one of the sublimiest and most pathetic compositions in the world. Paganism never rose and could never rise to such spiritual heights as are attained in the theology of that noble drama. What constitutes the power and impressiveness of Milton's last work is, therefore, not what it possesses in common with its formal models, but what distinguishes it from them.

And what applies to Milton's *Samson Agonistes* applies to every other important attempt to mould modern tragedy on Attic models. In the *Iphigenie in Tauris* Goethe has produced a masterpiece which, in intrinsic merit, well deserves to stand beside its classical prototype, but as a disciple of the Attic masters he appears to have aimed at little more than attaining the final effect of Greek tragedy, the sentiment of repose; attaining it, however, not as his masters attained it, by exhibiting 'agitating circumstances under the conditions of the severest form', but by avoiding them, and by 'keeping himself in the domain of the soul and conscience, not in that

of the emotions'. If Greek tragedy has, in its total effect, the repose and symmetry of marble statuary, it has nothing of that effect in its activity. Pulsing and thrilling with passion, it is passion which is its life and its soul, and the elimination of passion may produce what it has produced so impressively in Goethe's stately pageant, but it will not produce an analogy to Attic tragedy. In dispensing with the Chorus, Goethe has deviated as widely in form from his professed archetypes as he has in spirit and temper. In his *Prometheus Unbound* and in his *Hellas* Shelley also resorted to Greek models, but his modifications of them, not in form merely but in all respects, are so considerable that he can scarcely be called an imitator. Mr. Swinburne's two brilliant dramas, *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erectheus*, are in structure closer to Greek prototypes, but nothing could be more un-Greek than all that constitutes their attractiveness and all that constitutes their defects as works of art. If Agathon's tragedies had survived Mr. Swinburne's dramas might in these have had their counterparts, but they have little resemblance either aesthetically or ethically to anything which has come down to us from the masters of the Attic stage.

Of a very different order to any of these experiments is *Merope*. In this drama Matthew Arnold has had the courage to reproduce without the smallest modification the exact counterpart of Attic tragedy in its most perfect shape,—in the shape, that is to say, which it assumed in the maturest work of Sophocles. He determined to make no compromise, as his predecessors had done. In the art which had cast its spell over him he would confide. Knowing well that what he aspired to reproduce derived its characteristics and drew its inspiration and nutriment from a world which had long passed away, and which could not be recalled, he yet believed in the effectiveness and permanence of the Beautiful, whether expressing itself in form or in conception. His exact position he defines in the Preface to the original edition of his drama, where he complains that a too exclusive devotion to romanticism had led not only to the depreciation but to the misrepresentation of classicism :—

> And yet, whatever the critics may say, there exists, I am convinced, even in England, even in this stronghold of the romantic school, a wide

though an ill-informed curiosity on the subject of the so-called classical school, meriting a more complete satisfaction than it has hitherto obtained. Greek art—the antique—classical beauty—a nameless hope and interest attaches, I can often see, to these words, even in the minds of those who have been brought up among the productions of the romantic school; of those who have been taught to consider classicalism as inseparable from coldness, and the antique as another phrase for the unreal. So immortal, so indestructible is the power of true beauty, of consummate form: it may be submerged, but the tradition of it survives: nations arise which know it not, which hardly believe in the report of it; but they, too, are haunted with an indefinable interest in its name, with an inexplicable curiosity as to its nature.

'And,' he continues:—

I have long had the strongest desire to attempt, for my own satisfaction, to come to closer quarters with the form which produces such grand effects in the hands of the Greek masters: to try to obtain, through the medium of a living familiar language, a fuller and more intense feeling of that beauty, which, even when apprehended through the medium of a dead language, so powerfully affected me. . . . Not only is it vain to expect that the vast majority of mankind will ever undertake the toil of mastering a dead language, above all, a dead language so difficult as the Greek: but it may be doubted whether even those whose enthusiasm shrinks from no toil, can ever so thoroughly press into the intimate feeling of works composed in a dead language as their enthusiasm would desire. I desired to try, therefore, how much of the effectiveness of the Greek poetical forms I could retain in an English poem constructed under the conditions of those forms; of those forms, too, in their severest and most definite expression, in their application to dramatic poetry. I thought at first that I might accomplish my object by a translation of one of the great works of Aeschylus or Sophocles. But a translation is a work not only inferior to the original by the whole difference of talent between the first composer and his translator; it is even inferior to the best which the translator could do under more inspiring circumstances. No man can do his best with a subject which does not penetrate him: no man can be penetrated by a subject which he does not conceive independently.[1]

It was indeed fortunate that Arnold did not content himself with translation. For, penetrated with his subject and conceiving it independently, he has produced a poem

[1] *Merope* (first edition), Preface, viii-x.

which is not only the nearest approach possible in any modern language to Sophoclean tragedy, but he has illustrated, as effectively as Sophocles himself could have done had he written in English, all that can be achieved in impression by dramatic art working under the conditions imposed on it by the Greeks. If Goethe's test of what is of real permanent value in poetry be the residuum left after the subduction of its accidents and of all that constitutes its sensuous charm, then in *Merope* we have a criterion of Greek tragedy. For what no modern poet can reproduce is the power and magic of the language and of the rhythm. Only faintly perceptible now, even to sympathy as acute and intense as Arnold's, are the associations, and how much—how inexpressibly much—they mean, is all that is implied in the contrast between what appealed to the audience in the Theatre of Dionysus when Pericles was in his glory and what appeals to the world of to-day. These are some of the deductions, the immense deductions which have to be made. And there are others too. The grosser forms of the Greek Mythology are now as grotesque as they are repulsive, while out of the beautiful symbolism of its more refined forms the light has, at least for the many, long gone out. Christianity has made havoc of some of the capital articles in popular Greek ethics. What to Orestes and Electra, to Aepytus and Merope was the most sacred of duties, to us is a crime almost as shocking and reprehensible as the crime which it avenged. To Electra the heart of an ancient Greek would go out in admiring and unmingled sympathy, for he would see in her loathing and contempt for her mother and in her tense tenacity to her murderous purpose all that a father's loving and dutiful daughter ought to be. But how mingled are the feelings which she excites in us, how painful the impression left on us as we leave her exulting in her ghastly triumph. Arnold was so well aware of the repulsion created in our times by the spectacle of a woman tempered like Electra that in depicting his heroine he has made his one concession to modern sentiment. Averse to bloodshed, she has no desire to take the life of the murderer of her husband and children, indeed, she does all in her power to save him. She would bound her vengeance by his deposition and the restoration of her son.

But the most wonderful and impressive creation of the Greeks in art is not to be estimated by what the moral and intellectual progress of mankind has now rendered obsolete and defective. Indestructible and potent as beauty and truth is the poetry in which beauty and truth prevail, and in Attic tragedy crowned by Aeschylus and Sophocles, and in our own Romantic drama crowned by Shakespeare, we have the most precious of our literary inheritances from the past.

The disadvantages under which a modern poet who attempts to reproduce a form of art peculiar to conditions long since extinct, and impossible to revive, have already been explained. Let us see how far he has succeeded in impressing us. For this inquiry will involve what the present volume is designed to explain and illustrate—the distinguishing characteristics of Attic tragedy in its most perfect form, and the contrast presented by it to its modern rival, our own Romantic tragedy as represented by Shakespeare.

II

Let us take our stand on Aristotle's definition of tragedy, for here we have in embryo almost all that exegesis involves and requires.

> Tragedy is a representation of an action that is grave and great, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By 'language embellished' I mean language into which rhythm, harmony, and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts' I mean that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.[1]

And it may be convenient to add here, that by 'a certain magnitude' Aristotle means, what he afterwards explains, that the action should be 'comprised within such limits that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good,

[1] *Poetics*, ch. vi. 2, 3. Both here and elsewhere I give, occasionally modified, Professor Butcher's version.

or from good fortune to bad'.[1] Unlike our own Romantic drama it is an ideal, not a literal and realistic presentation of life; and it moves only on the heights of life, its plots being selected from what is most tragically impressive and imposing in legendary and historical tradition, its protagonists from the aristocracy of that tradition, gods and demigods, kings and nobles if male, of corresponding dignity when female. In the delineation of its *dramatis personae*—which are always few in number, never more than three, the third as a rule dumb, being on the stage at the same time—it is more careful to present what is typical than what is individual, so that they impress us rather as types of humanity than as distinct personalities. Indeed the representation of character is regarded as of comparatively small importance, character, as Aristotle observes, being altogether subsidiary to action. Everything contributes and everything is subordinated to the effect of the work as a whole, its aesthetic effect and its ethical effect, the first being the attainment, through symmetry of structure and the harmonious combination of the several elements entering into the composition, of unity of impression; and the second the production of the moral satisfaction and tranquillity consequent on the purgation of the passions of pity and fear. Consequently what was aimed at was not, as in our drama, variety of effect, but intensity; not complexity, but simplicity and concentration.

An analysis of the composition of Greek tragedy will show how admirably it was designed to attain these effects. It was a combination of two elements, blended but distinct, the lyric and musical, represented by the Chorus and occasionally by the *dramatis personae*, and the dramatic, which expressed itself as a rule in a form of verse which will be more exactly described presently. It was not, like ours, divided into acts and scenes, but yet had divisions roughly corresponding to our acts. The opening of the play and all that part of it which preceded the first Chorus was called the 'prologos'. The first Chorus was called the 'parodos', being as a rule sung by the Chorus as it entered the orchestra to take its stand round the 'thymele'; but occasionally, as in the *Electra* and in *Merope*, a 'kommos',—

[1] *Poetics*, vii. 6.

that is, a musical dialogue between one or more of the *dramatis personae* and the Chorus, takes its place. That part of the play which lies between the first Chorus (' parodos ' or 'kommos', as the case may be) and the next whole Chorus is called the ' first epeisodion '. This is followed by the next Chorus, which is called the ' first stasimon ', the ' second epeisodion ' succeeding, till interrupted by the ' second stasimon '. ' Epeisodia ' and ' stasima ' thus follow one another till the last epeisodion arrives, and as this marks the conclusion of the play—the exit of the actors and Chorus—it is called the ' exodus '.

As the tragic action must have an organic unity, the incidents comprised in it—following each other in accordance with the law of probable and necessary sequence—are indissolubly linked, admitting nothing extraneous to the action. With a distinct beginning, middle, and end, the plot is first complicated and then resolved, the complication (δέσις) consisting of the group of incidents which precede the decisive turn (μετάβασις) in the action, and the resolution (λύσις) of the group of incidents which follow it. The ' turn of fortune ', meaning a change from good fortune to bad, or from bad fortune to good, is the point in which the complication culminates. It may be accompanied with ' recognition ' (ἀναγνώρισις), that is, as Aristotle says, a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hatred between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune, or with reversal or recoil of the action (περιπέτεια), that is, a change by which a train of action produces the opposite of the effect intended, or with both. Where the turn of fortune takes place without ' recognition ' or ' reversal ' the plot is ' simple ' (ἁπλῆ), where it is accompanied with one or both of these it is ' complex ' (πεπλεγμένη). The best kind of plot, says Aristotle, is the ' complex ', and especially the ' complex ' where both ' recognition ' and ' reversal ' accompany the turn of fortune simultaneously. Of this we have an excellent example in *Merope*. In the scene in which Merope recognizes her son we have in combination the ' turn of fortune ', for she passes from bad fortune to good, from misery to contentment ; ' recognition ', for there is a change from ignorance to knowledge, from hatred to love ; ' reversal ', for the very opposite effect to the effect anticipated and intended is

the result. In the *Electra*, where Electra recognizes Orestes, we have the same combination.

But it is not in its structure only that the concentration of Greek tragedy displays itself. Whatever exception may be taken to the doctrine of the unities, only one of which—the unity of action—is exalted by Aristotle into a canon, it is certain that they are as a rule rigidly observed. Of the unity of place there are only two violations in extant plays [1]; of the unity of time, disregarded indeed by Aeschylus, there are in Sophocles and Euripides only two also, one in the *Trachiniae*, and one in the *Supplices*. In the *Electra*, it will be observed, the scene never changes from the precincts of the palace of the Pelopidae, in *Merope* from the precincts of the palace at Stenyclaros. The action of the *Electra* takes place between the early morning and noon of the same day, and the action of *Merope* occupies exactly the same time. To the observance of the unity of place may perhaps be attributed a remarkable and characteristic feature of Greek tragedy—the announcement of the catastrophe in an elaborate narrative delivered by a messenger, an expedient dispensed with, however, by Sophocles in the *Ajax* and in the *Electra*, a 'kommos' being substituted in the first play, while in the second the catastrophe takes place on the stage.

But no feature in Greek tragedy is so remarkable as the Chorus, and nothing illustrates so strikingly the tact of Greek dramatic artists as its development into what it became in the hands of Sophocles. We have seen how tragedy itself originally sprang out of the dithyramb, how the dithyramb became regulated, how by the introduction of the Hypocrites dialogue came in, and how the employment of a second actor by Aeschylus led to the distinction of the lyric element from the dramatic and at last to its subordination. But in this innovation Aeschylus moved slowly. It is probable that his first dramas were on the old model—consisted, that is to say, of long choral odes or lyric narratives addressed to the Chorus and of conversations between the Chorus and the

[1] In the *Eumenides* where the scene changes from Delphi to Athens, in the *Ajax* where it changes from the tent of Ajax to some place near the sea-shore. There may possibly be a change in the *Choephori* (640), but this is so doubtful that it would not be safe to cite it.

Hypocrites. In his first extant play, the *Supplices*, there is scarcely any action and only one scene of animated dialogue. It is not till we come to the *Prometheus* that we find the Chorus reduced to a subordinate part and assuming the position which it occupies in subsequent drama. Even in the plays in which his art culminated, the Orestean trilogy—that is, the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephori*, and the *Eumenides*—the Chorus, though still, especially in the first two, strictly subordinated to the dramatic action, has yet great prominence assigned to it. In the later dramas of Euripides and in the dramas of Agathon it was not merely subordinated to the dramatic action but wholly disconnected from it, and degraded into little more than a musical interlude. But in the hands of Sophocles it became what it would be no exaggeration to describe as the most ingenious and the most felicitous conception which ever suggested itself to an artist. Associating it essentially with the action of the drama, but in no way controlling or even affecting that action, it stood —*spectator haud particeps*—the symbol of sympathetic and reflective humanity. To the sufferings which it neither caused nor could cure it gave lyrical expression, and offered such consolation as it had the power to give. And it had other functions :—

> The Chorus was, at each stage in the action, to collect and weigh the impressions which the action would at that stage naturally make on a pious thoughtful mind ; and was at last, at the end of the tragedy, when the issue of the action appeared, to strike the final balance. If the feeling with which the actual spectator regarded the course of the tragedy could be deepened by reminding him of what was past, or by indicating to him what was to come, it was the province of the ideal spectator so to deepen it. To combine, to harmonize, to deepen for the spectator the feelings naturally excited in him by the sight of what was passing upon the stage—this is the one grand effect produced by the Chorus in Greek tragedy.[1]

Nor were these the only functions and effects of the Chorus :—

> Coleridge observes that Shakespeare, after one of his grandest scenes, often plunges, as if to relax and relieve himself, into a scene of buffoonery. After tragic situations of the greatest intensity, a desire for relief and relaxation is no doubt natural, both to the poet and to

[1] Preface to *Merope*, pp. xlii-iii.

the spectator, but the finer feeling of the Greeks found this relief, not in buffoonery but in lyrical song. The noble and natural relief from the emotion produced by tragic events is in the transition to the emotion produced by lyric poetry, not in the contrast and shock of a totally opposite order of feelings. The relief afforded to excited feeling by lyrical song every one has experienced at the opera. . . . But in the opera the lyrical element of feeling and relaxation is in excess: the dramatic element, the element of intellect and labour, is in defect. In the best Greek tragedy the lyrical element occupies its true place; it is the relief and solace in the stress and conflict of the action ; it is not the substantive business.[1]

It is in this union of the lyrical and dramatic elements, regarded both in relation to the effect produced in contrast and in relation to what they combine and comprise, that Sophoclean drama is, as a work of art, so superior to Shakespearean drama. For it is not by buffoonery only that Shakespeare has to supply so unsatisfactorily what is supplied by the Chorus for the relief of emotion, but the reflective and didactic element which is expressed so appropriately in those lyrics he has to distribute among his *dramatis personae*, often at the expense of dramatic propriety.

Sophocles, unlike Euripides, was also careful to secure the unity and symmetry of his work as a whole by corresponding unity and symmetry in the structure of his Choruses, so that each Chorus, each choric expression of the lyrical element, produces in itself the same harmonious effect as the drama in totality produces. Thus by the systematic employment of 'strophe', 'antistrophe', and 'epode', a regular correspondence of part with part, a balanced antithesis of thought to thought, of emotion to emotion, is effected, while in an independent final stanza—the 'epode'—the balance of the whole is struck. In this Arnold, it will be seen, follows him, while in *Samson Agonistes* Milton follows Euripides, whose Choruses are constructed on the relaxed monostrophic principle. What applies to the Choruses applies to the 'kommos' or dialogues between the Chorus and actors or one of the actors.

To pass now to the versification and style, to Aristotle's requirement that tragedy must be 'in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds

[1] Preface to *Merope*, pp. xliii–iv.

being found in separate parts of the play'. The lyric measures employed were very various, too various to be specified here, and exquisitely adapted to express not only every phase of emotion and thought, but every note of both. Such is the intrinsic harmony of the language and the rhythm that the loss of the music which was their accompaniment and to which they were set, and even ignorance of the technicalities of metre, in no way interferes with the magic of their effect. It is, indeed, in its lyric that Greek tragedy is in any other language unapproached and unapproachable, the despair alike of translators and of imitators. Arnold, as he himself says [1], makes no attempt to reproduce the Greek rhythms; all he has done is, what Milton apparently aimed at also, 'to follow rhythms which produced on my own feeling a similar impression to that produced on it by the rhythms of Greek choric poetry'. But he has not been so successful as Milton, and the lyric parts of *Merope*, and particularly the Choruses, are by far the most unsatisfactory portions of the work.

In the dramatic as distinguished from the lyrical portions of the plays, a very different form and system of verse was employed. This is known technically as Iambic Trimeter Acatalectic (that is, with the feet completed), a metre particularly appropriate for dramatic dialogue and soliloquy; and this for two reasons. It is of all metres the nearest to the language of nature and life,—conversational speech often, as Aristotle observes [2], running naturally into Iambics—and it is at the same time susceptible, with certain modifications, of the utmost dignity and majesty. It thus combines all that is appropriate for familiar and animated colloquy and all that is appropriate for the stateliest rhetoric. Its basis is the iambus, and each line consists of six feet:—

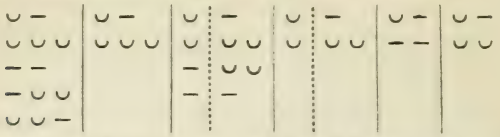
$$\cup - | \cup - | \cup - | \cup - | \cup - | \cup -$$

Of these the first four feet may be resolved into tribrachs ($\cup \cup \cup$), the first and third into dactyls ($- \cup \cup$), the first, third, and fifth into spondees ($- -$), the first into a dactyl ($- \cup \cup$), and an anapest ($\cup \cup -$), as well as a spondee.

[1] Preface to *Merope*, xlvi.

[2] 'The iambic is of all measures the most colloquial; we see it in the fact that conversational speech runs into iambic form more frequently than into any other kind of verse.' *Poetics* iv. 14.

So that the scheme may be thus summarized :—



Each verse must have a caesura or break between words in the middle either of the third or of the fourth foot, as they are marked by dots in the above scheme. In the case of proper names and of proper names only, anapests may be admitted in any foot except the last. But we have, fortunately, in our own language, a metre as nearly its counterpart as one metre can be to another, and that is our heroic blank verse, which is, however, shorter by one foot, as it contains properly only five feet, though an alexandrine is sometimes admitted as in Shakespeare :—

⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ –
Hath power | enough | to serve | our turn | : but who | comes here ?

And here it becomes metrically equivalent to the Greek iambic trimeter. In the hands of its masters it can produce with equal success and impressiveness all the effects produced or producible by this noble creation of the Greek artists. Here, and here only, translator and imitator stand, so far as their instrument is concerned, at no disadvantage with their originals and models. No one, it is true, can pretend to say that Arnold's blank verse in *Merope* can in rhythmic effect compare for a moment with the iambic trimeters of Sophocles, but the fault lies not in the instrument but in the artist. In all that pertains to music and harmony, the most finished iambic trimeters which Sophocles ever wrote are fully rivalled, and rivalled in the production of the same effects by the blank verse of such a poem as Tennyson's *Tithonus*, just as the grand and massive harmonies of the Aeschylean iambic trimeters reverb with correspondent impressiveness from the great speeches in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. But the dialogue did not confine itself to the iambic trimeter ; for lively disputes the trochaic tetrameter was occasionally employed, and, as passion kindled, it frequently burst into anapests and into various lyric modes.

Thus Greek tragedy, having at its command all the resources

of lyrical and all the resources of rhetorical expression which, with incomparable plasticity, it blended, mutually modified, or employed separately, as dramatic propriety required, is an unrivalled creation of art.

Before we pass from the composition of Attic tragedy to its ethic, there is one element in it, and particularly in Sophoclean tragedy, so important that we must pause over it : this is known as tragic irony. Irony, as I need scarcely say, is a pure Greek word—εἰρωνεία, and properly means dissimulation. Applied to tragedy it is the expression of contrast between things as they seem to be and things as they really are ; it may reveal itself in circumstance and it may reveal itself in speech, and in speech it may be either conscious or unconscious. Thus, to confine our illustrations to the two plays in this volume, we have the irony of circumstance when Electra with the supposed ashes of her brother in her hands is mourning over the extinction of her hopes, and when Aegisthus while unveiling the corpse of Clytemnestra supposes, in impious triumph, that he is unveiling that of Orestes. In *Merope* we have it in the scene where Merope is bending over her sleeping son, thinking that he is the murderer of that son, and when Polyphontes, with his hand upon the steer whose blood is,—so he in apparent triumph imagines,—to cement the bond of peace and security, is about, by the shedding of his own blood, to secure peace and security in a very different sense than the sense intended by him. Of irony in speech, when unconscious, we have examples in the 'kommos' both of the *Electra* and of the *Merope* when following, in the one play the supposed death of Orestes, in the other the supposed death of Aepytus ; and in Polyphontes' speeches (868–883 and 885–899) just after he has heard the report of the prince's death, as well as in the Chorus which follows. But nowhere is it more effective than when it is conscious, when every word is pregnant with double meaning, having one sense to the speaker and to the audience, who are in the speaker's confidence, and another to the deluded plaything of its terrible and ghastly mockery. Such in the *Electra* would be the dialogue between Orestes and Aegisthus (1470–1483), such in *Merope* would be the last dialogue between Merope and Polyphontes (1793–1837). But in Sophocles it extends still further, suffusing and becoming the

ruling motive of whole dramas, as notably in the *Oedipus Rex*, the *Ajax*, and the *Trachiniae*. It is so in *Merope*. Here its centre is Polyphontes' pining desire for 'peace', a 'peace' which is to be brought about, though he little knows it, by his own terrible death.

> Peace, peace is what I seek, and public calm (l. 101)

are his words to Merope when he implores her to become reconciled to him.

> A private loss here founds a nation's peace (l. 889)

is his exclamation when he hears the news of the supposed death of Aepytus.

> Peace, who tarriest too long;
> Peace, with delight in thy train;
> Come, come back to our prayer! (ll. 890-92)

echoes the Chorus.

> *Aepytus.* Mother, sometimes the justice of the Gods
> Appoints the way to peace through shedding blood.
> *Merope.* Sorrowful peace!
> *Aepytus.* And yet the only peace to us allow'd. (ll. 1247-50)

is the ominous note sounded as the catastrophe approaches.

> And grant henceforth to the Messenians peace! (l. 1917)

are the last words of Polyphontes just before the axe crashes into his skull.

As in the *Electra*, and in the dramas of Sophocles generally, Destiny and the Destiny-element are kept altogether in the background and in *Merope* are scarcely perceptible, certainly in no way operative. In Sophocles it was impossible to eliminate them, for they were implicit in the legends, but he has done his utmost to minimize their power as agents. In the *Electra* retribution comes as the moral result of deliberate crime deliberately aggravated, and the freedom of the will may be postulated with as much justification as the common-sense of mankind postulates it in every system of criminal legislation. Aepytus is, indeed, the 'Destiny-led stranger', but the Destiny which leads him is little more than the impersonation of the moral law directed by what Arnold's master doubted as little as Shakespeare, an ever-watchful Providence ruling in righteousness and justice.

We now arrive at the important question of the end and aim of tragedy, as conceived by the Greeks, the purgation (*κάθαρσις*) of the passions of pity and fear. To discuss the innumerable explanations which have been given of the meaning of this passage would require a dissertation too lengthy for this preface, and such discussion is not here necessary. About its real meaning there can be little doubt. 'Katharsis' is a medical term with a medical meaning, 'purgation', and it has also a religious and moral meaning, 'purification'. The first implies the relief afforded by the removal of a painful or disturbing element in the body, and the passions of pity and fear are contemplated as a similarly disturbing element in the emotional nature. If they are not occasionally relieved and tempered by artificial excitement they may become immoderate, and when anything occurs to excite them in real life, exhibit themselves in unreasonable excess. As people in old times thought it conducive to physical health and comfort to be periodically bled, so for the security of moral health and comfort we should resort to tragedy to temper and moderate what might seriously disturb such health and comfort.

Nor is this all. The pleasure which accompanies the artificial relief of these passions is not only a perfectly legitimate pleasure, but has also the effect of salutary moral discipline.

That the passions of pity and fear may be excited and excited under the conditions prescribed in Aristotle's definition of the action, namely, that it is 'grave and great', it is most important that the plot and the protagonist should be appropriately chosen. The protagonist must be a person of consequence, the plot must be associated with august traditions. Care must be taken that what is presented should have no other effect than the proper one. The spectacle, for example, of a perfectly good man involved in disaster and ruin is simply perplexing, painful, and revolting (*μιαρόν*). The spectacle of a perfectly bad man coming to an evil end may excite emotions kindred to pity and fear (*φιλανθρωπία*), but pity and fear in the true sense of the terms it cannot excite, for pity springs from sympathy with undeserved suffering, and fear from what happens to one of like nature with ourselves, and normal men are not perfectly bad. Still less must we be presented with the

spectacle of a bad man passing from adversity to happiness ; for that, so far from exciting pity and fear, is an outrage on our moral sense. It follows, then, that the sufferer must be neither a perfectly good, nor a perfectly bad man, but a mixed character, like ourselves. What involves him in ruin must not be deliberate and repulsive wickedness, but some great error or weakness ; he must be a person who is highly renowned and prosperous, and if faulty and frail, with eminent virtues.

All this is illustrated in Polyphontes as Arnold depicts him. Descended from Hercules he is a man of illustrious lineage, and he had played a great part in the history of Messenia. His crime was a terrible one, but it had been prompted by no mean motive. At the head of the rival faction to that which supported Cresphontes, and which was in deadly feud with him, it had been to secure the triumph of the Dorians, as it had been with their assistance and consent, that he had slain Cresphontes and ascended his throne. Though he had forced the murdered king's widow to marry him, he had been her husband only in name, and had treated her with the utmost respect and delicacy, as she herself gratefully owns. Indeed the woman who had most reason to hate him says, as she stands over his corpse :—

> I triumph not
> Over thy corpse—triumph not, neither mourn,—
> For I find worth in thee, and badness too. (ll. 1988–90)

And this strikes the balance.

Thus has Arnold in this drama observed to the letter every canon laid down by Aristotle, and reflected faithfully every feature of Attic tragedy.

III

The requirements of Greek tragedy necessarily restricted its area in the choice of plots, and it confined itself, as Aristotle notes, to the history of a few houses. It is not known whether any other Greek poet besides Euripides dramatized the story of Merope, though both Aristotle and Plutarch have noticed the thrilling effect of the recognition scene. The fragments of Euripides' drama, the *Cresphontes*, are too scanty to enable us to know how he treated the subject.

Three accounts of the legend have come down to us—one

from Apollodorus, one from Pausanias, and one from Hyginus, of which Arnold remarks that that of Apollodorus is the most ancient, that of Pausanias the most historically valuable, and that of Hyginus the fullest. Of these he gives two; that of Hyginus runs thus:—

Merope sent away and concealed her infant son. Polyphontes sought for him everywhere and promised gold to whoever should slay him. He, when he grew up, laid a plan to avenge the murder of his father and brothers. In pursuance of this plan he came to king Polyphontes and asked for the promised gold, saying that he had slain the son of Cresphontes and Merope. The king ordered him to be hospitably entertained, intending to inquire further of him. He being very tired, went to sleep, and an old man, who was the channel through whom the mother and son used to communicate, arrives at this moment in tears, bringing word to Merope that her son had disappeared from his protector's house. Merope believing that the sleeping stranger is the murderer of her son, comes into the guest-chamber with an axe, not knowing that he whom she would slay was her son: the old man recognized him. After the recognition had taken place, Merope, to prepare the way for her vengeance, affected to be reconciled with Polyphontes. The king, overjoyed, celebrated a sacrifice; his guest, pretending to strike the sacrificial victim, slew the king and so got back his father's kingdom.[1]

Apollodorus says:—

Cresphontes had not reigned long in Messenia, when he was murdered with two of his sons. And Polyphontes reigned in his stead, he too being of the family of Hercules, and he had for his wife, against her will, Merope, the widow of the murdered king. But Merope had borne to Cresphontes a third son called Aepytus: him she gave to her own father to bring up. He, when he came to man's estate, returned secretly to Messenia and slew Polyphontes and the other murderers of his father.[2]

The source of the legend which attributed the murder of Cresphontes to Polyphontes is not known. In the account which Pausanias gives[3] he attributes the murder of Cresphontes 'to the men of property' who were angry with them for governing in the interest of the commons, and does not so much as mention Polyphontes. Arnold's drama is founded mainly on the version of the legend given by

[1] *Fable*, clxxxiv. [2] ii. 8. § 5.

[3] *Description of Greece*, Bk. iv. iii; Frazer's *Pausanias*, vol. i. 182-3.

Hyginus, which, however, he has, it will be seen, slightly modified. For the historical portion, and for all the local colouring, he has drawn on Pausanias. What little he has borrowed from preceding dramatizers of the story, which is next to nothing, will be duly shown in the notes. The drama is obviously modelled closely on the *Electra* of Sophocles, to the plot of which its plot has near resemblance.

Into any detailed account of Arnold's predecessors in the dramatic treatment of the story, and they were many, it is not necessary to enter. It formed the subject of a classical drama in Italian by Count Pomponio Torelli, published at Parma in 1605 and reprinted in the first volume of the *Teatro Italiano*. In the seventeenth century it formed the subject of at least four dramas in French, in one of which, entitled *Téléphonte*, the celebrated Cardinal Richelieu had a hand. But in 1713 a really remarkable tragedy was founded on it ; this was the *Merope* of Scipio Maffei, an Italian nobleman, and an eminent historian and antiquary, whom Voltaire calls the Sophocles and Varro of Verona. Few dramas in the eighteenth century made so great a sensation in Europe, and it is a work of real ingenuity and much interest. The account which Arnold gives of it may be transcribed :—

Maffei makes some important changes in the story as told by ancient relaters. In his tragedy the unknown prince, Merope's son, is called Egisto ; Merope herself is not, as the ancients represented her, at the time of her son's return the wife of Polyphontes, but is repelling the importunate offer of his hand by her husband's murderer : Egisto does not, like Orestes, know his own parentage, and returns secretly to his own home in order to wreak vengeance, in concert with his mother, upon his father's murderer: he imagines himself the son of Messenian parents, but of a rank not royal, entrusted to an old man, Polidoro, to be brought up ; and is driven by curiosity to quit his protector and visit his native land. He enters Messenia and is attacked by a robber, whom he kills. The blood upon his dress attracts the notice of some soldiers of Polyphontes whom he falls in with : he is seized and brought to the royal palace. On hearing his story a suspicion seizes Merope, who has heard from Polidoro that their son has quitted him and that the slain person must have been her own son. The suspicion is confirmed by the sight of a ring on the finger of Egisto, which had belonged to Cresphontes, and which Merope supposes the unknown stranger to have taken from her murdered son : she twice attempts his

life : the arrival of Polidoro at last clears up the mystery for her ; but at the very moment when she recognizes Egisto they are separated, and no interview of recognition takes place between the mother and son. Finally the prince is made acquainted with his origin and kills Polyphontes in the manner described by Hyginus.[1]

The celebrity of Maffei's work induced Voltaire to take up the subject, and in 1736 he composed his own *Merope*, which, when it was produced in 1743, rivalled in popularity its Italian predecessor. Voltaire departs even further from the original tradition than Maffei, and has produced a clever and effective work in the best style, so far as construction is concerned, of classical French tragedy. Passing over Aaron Hill's frigid and heavy adaptation of Voltaire's tragedy, we come to the *Merope* of Alfieri, which appeared in 1783. With certain unimportant modifications his plot follows in the first part of the drama that of Maffei's version, in the second part that of Voltaire, and when we say that it has all the merits and all the limitations of its author's most characteristic classical dramas we say all that, here at least, need be said.

Arnold has criticized the treatment of the story by his predecessors with much acumen, and has succeeded in showing as well as illustrating in his own treatment of it how much more effectively it could be treated by a closer adherence to ancient tradition. It is, indeed, when we compare such a drama as Arnold's with such dramas as those of Maffei and Voltaire that we feel the superiority from every point of view—in the treatment, that is to say, of classical subjects—of pure strict classicism to any of the more superficially attractive forms of pseudo-classicism.

IV

The action of *Merope* opens at daybreak on the morning of the twentieth anniversary of the murder of Cresphontes. Aepytus and his Uncle Laias, Merope's brother, have just arrived in disguise from Arcadia at Stenyclaros, the purpose of Aepytus being to make his way into the royal palace that he may announce his own death, while Laias is to mingle with the people and ascertain whether any of them still remember with affection their old king and are hostile to the tyrant who slew him

[1] Preface to *Merope*, xvii–xviii.

and fills his place. Twenty years have passed since Aepytus, then a baby, had been rescued from the fate of his father and two brothers, and placed by a faithful servant, Arcas, under the protection of his maternal grandfather Cypselus, the reigning king of Arcadia. There, carefully watched and guarded by Arcas—for it was feared that Polyphontes would bribe some one to destroy him—he had grown up to manhood. With his mother, though he could never see her, he kept up a regular communication through Arcas, who visited her every year at Stenyclaros, she pining for her son's return and restoration to his father's throne, he nursing the sterner purpose of revenging his father's murder in recovering his father's throne. It was on this quest that he had come. But the danger was great. As in his father's time, there were two factions in Stenyclaros—the Dorian, which had supported and enabled Polyphontes to stand where he did, and the Messenian, of which his father had been the head. All depended on which faction was the strongest. Stern and unpopular as Polyphontes was, political considerations would outweigh all others, and Aepytus and Merope had little hope if the Messenian cause did not prove to be in the ascendant.

At this crisis and under these conditions the action of the play opens.

It remains to say a word about one of the features of this drama in which it does not recall, as it recalls in everything else, the characteristics of Sophocles. Arnold makes no attempt to imitate the subtle elaboration of his master's style, his studied artificiality of expression, the pregnant suggestiveness with which by a nice discrimination in the use of words, and by delicacies of collocation, he conveys so much more than he formally and definitely presents. Tennyson might have shown Arnold how this could have been done in English almost as effectually as Sophocles has achieved it in Greek, and as Virgil has achieved it in Latin. We look in vain, for example, in *Merope* for such a note in Sophocles' diction as we find in such expressions as

ἔκειρε πολύκερων φόνον (*Ajax* 55);

literally 'he cut a many-horned slaughter', for 'he dealt slaughter among the horned flocks and herds'.

Or: Πανσύρτῳ παμμήνῳ δεινῶν
στυγνῶν τ' ἀχέων αἰῶνι (*Electra* 851-2);

'a life through all the months swept together from all sides of many dread and hateful things', which can only be paraphrased in some such way as Jebb manages it, i. e. 'in my life of troubles dread and dark, surging blindly through all the months'.

Or again, where the rivals for Deianira are described in the *Trachiniae* 506:

Τίνες πάμπληκτα παγκόνιτά τ' ἐξῆλθον ἄεθλ' ἀγώνων.

literally 'who went through the all-battered, all-bedusted prizes of combats?' which can only be expressed in more or less loose periphrasis, as 'who came forth from the contest with the prizes won with showers of blows and amid clouds of dust', or possibly 'who went forth to battle's ordeal, to showers of blows and clouds of dust'. These are, no doubt, extreme instances, but, in more or less modified forms, they enter essentially into Sophocles' mode of expression, and in a professed imitation of him their absence is striking. Arnold's diction, indeed, apart from his rhythm—for his rhythm is Sophoclean—recalls much more nearly the ordinary diction of Euripides.

Merope first appeared in 1858 with a Preface, from which I have given all necessary extracts, explaining on what principle and for what purpose the drama was composed, and also with a Historical Introduction explaining the legendary history on which the plot is based and with which its incidents and *dramatis personae* are associated. It was not reprinted till it reappeared in 1885, making up with *Empedocles on Etna* the third volume of the poems there collected. It was then carefully revised, as the collation with the first edition given in the notes in this volume will show. After 1885 the text does not appear to have been altered at all.

It has not been thought necessary to reprint the original Preface, because all that is of importance and permanent interest in the first has been extracted in this General Introduction, but the Historical Introduction has been reprinted in an Appendix for purposes of reference, though the information given in it has been more appropriately distributed among the explanatory notes, so that it is not necessary for the student to master its contents before reading the drama.

APPENDIX

ARNOLD'S HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Apollodorus says:—'Cresphontes had not reigned long in Messenia when he was murdered, together with two of his sons. And Polyphontes reigned in his stead, he, too, being of the family of Hercules; and he had for his wife, against her will, Merope, the widow of the murdered king. But Merope had borne to Cresphontes a third son, called Aepytus; him she gave to her own father to bring up. He, when he came to man's estate, returned secretly to Messenia, and slew Polyphontes and the other murderers of his father.'

Hyginus says:—'Merope sent away and concealed her infant son. Polyphontes sought for him everywhere in vain. He, when he grew up, laid a plan to avenge the murder of his father and brothers. In pursuance of this plan he came to king Polyphontes and reported the death of the son of Cresphontes and Merope. The king ordered him to be hospitably entertained, intending to inquire further of him. He, being very tired, went to sleep, and an old man, who was the channel through whom the mother and son used to communicate, arrives at this moment in tears, bringing word to Merope that her son had disappeared from his protector's house, and was slain. Merope, believing that the sleeping stranger is the murderer of her son, comes into the guest-chamber with an axe, not knowing that he whom she would slay was her son; the old man recognized him, and withheld Merope from slaying him. The king, Polyphontes, rejoicing at the supposed death of Aepytus, celebrated a sacrifice; his guest, pretending to strike the sacrificial victim, slew the king, and so got back his father's kingdom.'

The events on which the action of the drama turns belong to the period of transition from the heroic and fabulous to the human and historic age of Greece. The doings of the hero Hercules, the ancestor of the Messenian Aepytus, belong to fable; but the invasion of Peloponnesus by the Dorians under chiefs claiming to be descended from Hercules, and their settlement in Argos,

Lacedaemon, and Messenia, belong to history. Aepytus is descended on the father's side from Hercules, Perseus, and the kings of Argos; on the mother's side from Pelasgus, and the aboriginal kings of Arcadia. Callisto, the daughter of the wicked Lycaon, and the mother, by Zeus, of Arcas, from whom the Arcadians took their name, was the granddaughter of Pelasgus. The birth of Arcas brought upon Callisto the anger of the virgin-goddess Artemis, whose service she followed: she was changed into a she-bear, and in this form was chased by her own son, grown to manhood. Zeus interposed, and the mother and son were removed from the earth, and placed among the stars. Callisto became the famous constellation of the Great Bear; her son became Arcturus, Arctophylax, or Boötes. From this son of Callisto were descended Cypselus, the maternal grandfather of Aepytus, and the children of Cypselus, Laias, and Merope.

The story of the life of Hercules, the paternal ancestor of Aepytus, is so well known that there is no need to record it. The reader will remember that, although entitled to the throne of Argos by right of descent from Perseus and Danaus, and to the thrones of Sparta and Messenia by right of conquest, Hercules yet passed his life in labours and wanderings, subjected by the degree of fate to the commands of his kinsman, the feeble and malignant Eurystheus. At his death he bequeathed to his offspring, the Heracleidae, his own claims to the kingdoms of Peloponnesus, and to the persecution of Eurystheus. They at first sought shelter with Ceyx, king of Trachis; he was too weak to protect them, and they then took refuge at Athens. The Athenians refused to deliver them up at the demand of Eurystheus; he invaded Attica, and a battle was fought near Marathon, in which, after Macaria, a daughter of Hercules, had devoted herself for the preservation of her house, Eurystheus fell, and the Heracleidae and their Athenian protectors were victorious. The memory of Macaria's self-sacrifices was perpetuated by the name of a spring of water on the plain of Marathon, the spring Macaria. The Heracleidae then endeavoured to effect their return to Peloponnesus. Hyllus, the eldest of them, inquired of the oracle at Delphi respecting their return; he was told to return by the *narrow passage* and in the *third harvest*. Accordingly, in the third year from that time Hyllus led an army to the Isthmus of Corinth; but there he was encountered by an army of Achaians and Arcadians, and fell in single combat with Echemus, king of Tegea. Upon this defeat the Heracleidae retired to northern Greece; there, after much wandering, they finally took refuge with Aegimius, king of the Dorians, who appears to have been the fastest friend of their house, and whose Dorian warriors formed the army which at last achieved their return. But, for a hundred years from the date of their first attempt, the Heracleidae were defeated in their successive invasions of Peloponnesus. Cleolaus and

Aristomachus, the son and grandson of Hyllus, fell in unsuccessful expeditions. At length the sons of Aristomachus, Temenus, Cresphontes, and Aristodemus, when grown up, repaired to Delphi and taxed the oracle with the non-fulfilment of the promise made to their ancestor Hyllus. But Apollo replied that his oracle had been misunderstood; for that by the *third harvest* he had meant the third generation, and by the *narrow passage* he had meant the straits of the Corinthian Gulf. After this explanation the sons of Aristomachus built a fleet at Naupactus; and finally, in the hundredth year from the death of Hyllus and the eightieth from the fall of Troy, the invasion was again attempted and was this time successful. The son of Orestes, Tisamenus, who ruled both Argos and Lacedaemon, fell in battle; many of his vanquished subjects left their homes and took refuge in Achaia.

The spoil was now to be divided among the conquerors. Aristodemus, the youngest of the sons of Aristomachus, did not survive to enjoy his share. He was slain at Delphi by the sons of Pylades and Electra, the kinsman, through their mother, of the house of Agamemnon, that house which the Heracleidae with their Dorian army had dispossessed. The claims of Aristodemus descended to his two sons, Procles and Eurysthenes, children under the guardianship of their maternal uncle, Theras. Temenus, the eldest of the sons of Aristomachus, took the kingdom of Argos. For the two remaining kingdoms, that of Sparta and that of Messenia, his two nephews, who were to rule jointly, and their uncle Cresphontes, had to cast lots. Cresphontes wished to have the fertile Messenia, and induced his brother to acquiesce in a trick which secured it to him. The lot of Cresphontes and that of his two nephews were to be placed in a water-jar, and thrown out. Messenia was to belong to him whose lot came out first. With the connivance of Temenus, Cresphontes marked as his own lot a pellet composed of baked clay, as the lot of his nephews, a pellet of unbaked clay; the unbaked pellet was of course dissolved in the water, while the brick pellet fell out alone. Messenia, therefore, was assigned to Cresphontes.

Messenia was at this time ruled by Melanthus, a descendant of Neleus. This ancestor, a prince of the great house of Aeolus, had come from Thessaly and succeeded to the Messenian throne on the failure of the previous dynasty. Melanthus and his race were thus foreigners in Messenia and were unpopular. His subjects offered little or no opposition to the invading Dorians; Melanthus abandoned his kingdom to Cresphontes, and retired to Athens.

Cresphontes married Merope, whose native country, Arcadia, was not affected by the Dorian invasion. This marriage, the issue of which was three sons, connected him with the native population of Peloponnesus. He built a new capital of Messenia, Stenyclaros, and transferred thither, from Pylos, the seat of government; he

proposed, moreover, says Pausanias, to divide Messenia into five states, and to confer on the native Messenians equal privileges with their Dorian conquerors. The Dorians complained that his administration unduly favoured the vanquished people; his chief magnates, headed by Polyphontes, himself a descendant of Hercules, formed a cabal against him, and he was slain with his two eldest sons. The youngest son of Cresphontes, Aepytus, then an infant, was saved by his mother, who sent him to her father, Cypselus, the king of Arcadia, under whose protection he was brought up.

The drama begins at the moment when Aepytus, grown to manhood, returns secretly to Messenia to take vengeance on his father's murderers. At this period Temenus was no longer reigning at Argos; he had been murdered by his sons, jealous of their brother-in-law, Deiphontes. The sons of Aristodemus, Procles and Eurysthenes, at variance with their uncle and ex-guardian, Theras, were reigning at Sparta.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

LAIAS, *uncle of* AEPYTUS, *brother of* MEROPE.
AEPYTUS, *son of* MEROPE *and* CRESPHONTES.
POLYPHONTES, *king of* MESSENIA.
MEROPE, *widow of* CRESPHONTES, *the murdered king of* MESSENIA.
THE CHORUS, *of* MESSENIAN *maidens.*
ARCAS, *an old man of* MEROPE'S *household.*
MESSENGER.
GUARDS, ATTENDANTS, &c.

The Scene is before the royal palace in STENYCLAROS, *the capital of* MESSENIA. *In the foreground is the tomb of* CRESPHONTES. *The action commences at daybreak.*

The structure is as follows:—

1. Prologos, 1–384.
2. Kommos, 385–544.
3. Epeisodion I, 545–621.
4. Stasimon I, 622–702.
5. Epeisodion II, 703–889.
6. Stasimon II, 890–913.
7. Epeisodion III, 914–1595.
8. Stasimon III, 1596–1683.
9. Epeisodion IV, 1684–1793.
10. Stasimon IV, 1794–1882.
11. Exodus, 1883 to end.

MEROPE

LAIAS. AEPYTUS

Lai. SON of Cresphontes, we have reach'd the goal
Of our night-journey, and thou see'st thy home.
Behold thy heritage, thy father's realm!
This is that fruitful, famed Messenian land,
Wealthy in corn and flocks, which, when at last
The late-relenting Gods with victory brought
The Heracleidae back to Pelops' isle,
Fell to thy father's lot, the second prize.
Before thy feet this recent city spreads
Of Stenyclaros, which he built, and made
Of his fresh-conquer'd realm the royal seat,
Degrading Pylos from its ancient rule.
There stands the temple of thine ancestor,
Great Heracles; and, in that public place,
Zeus hath his altar, where thy father fell.
Southward and west, behold those snowy peaks,
Taygetus, Laconia's border-wall;
And, on this side, those confluent streams which make
Pamisus watering the Messenian plain;
Then to the north, Lycaeus and the hills
Of pastoral Arcadia, where, a babe
Snatch'd from the slaughter of thy father's house,
Thy mother's kin received thee, and rear'd up.—
Our journey is well made, the work remains
Which to perform we made it; means for that
Let us consult, before this palace sends

Its inmates on their daily tasks abroad.
Haste and advise, for day comes on apace.

Aep. O brother of my mother, guardian true,
And second father from that hour when first
My mother's faithful servant laid me down,
An infant, at the hearth of Cypselus,
My grandfather, the good Arcadian king—
Thy part it were to advise, and mine to obey.
But let us keep that purpose, which, at home,
We judged the best; chance finds no better way.
Go thou into the city, and seek out
Whate'er in the Messenian people stirs
Of faithful fondness for their former king
Or hatred to their present; in this last
Will lie, my grandsire said, our fairest chance.
For tyrants make man good beyond himself;
Hate to their rule, which else would die away,
Their daily-practised chafings keep alive.
Seek this! revive, unite it, give it hope;
Bid it rise boldly at the signal given.
Meanwhile within my father's palace I,
An unknown guest, will enter, bringing word
Of my own death—but, Laias, well I hope
Through that pretended death to live and reign.

[The Chorus *comes forth.*

Softly, stand back!—see, to these palace gates
What black procession slowly makes approach?—
Sad-chanting maidens clad in mourning robes,
With pitchers in their hands, and fresh-pull'd flowers—
Doubtless, they bear them to my father's tomb.

[Merope *comes forth.*

And look, to meet them, that one, grief-plunged Form,
Severer, paler, statelier than they all,

A golden circlet on her queenly brow!
O Laias, Laias, let the heart speak here—
Shall I not greet her? shall I not leap forth?

[POLYPHONTES *comes forth, following* MEROPE.

Lai. Not so! thy heart would pay its moment's speech
By silence ever after, for, behold!
The King (I know him, even through many years)
Follows the approaching Queen, who stops, as call'd.
No lingering now! straight to the city I;
Do thou, till for thine entrance to this house
The happy moment comes, lurk here unseen
Behind the shelter of thy father's tomb;
Remove yet further off, if aught comes near.
But, here while harbouring, on its margin lay,
Sole offering that thou hast, locks from thy head;
And fill thy leisure with an earnest prayer
To his avenging Shade, and to the Gods
Who under earth watch guilty deeds of men,
To guide our vengeance to a prosperous close.

[LAIAS *goes out.* POLYPHONTES, MEROPE, *and* THE CHORUS *come forward. As they advance,* AEPYTUS, *who at first conceals himself behind the tomb, moves off the stage.*

Pol. [*To* THE CHORUS] Set down your pitchers, maidens, and fall back!
Suspend your melancholy rites awhile;
Shortly ye shall resume them with your Queen.—
[*To* MEROPE] I sought thee, Merope; I find thee thus,
As I have ever found thee; bent to keep,
By sad observances and public grief,
A mournful feud alive, which else would die.
I blame thee not, I do thy heart no wrong!
Thy deep seclusion, thine unyielding gloom,
Thine attitude of cold, estranged reproach,

These punctual funeral honours, year by year
Repeated, are in thee, I well believe,
Courageous, faithful actions, nobly dared.
But, Merope, the eyes of other men
Read in these actions, innocent in thee,
Perpetual promptings to rebellious hope,
War-cries to faction, year by year renew'd,
Beacons of vengeance, not to be let die.
And me, believe it, wise men gravely blame,
And ignorant men despise me, that I stand
Passive, permitting thee what course thou wilt.
Yes, the crowd mutters that remorseful fear
And paralysing conscience stop my arm,
When it should pluck thee from thy hostile way.
All this I bear, for, what I seek, I know:
Peace, peace is what I seek, and public calm;
Endless extinction of unhappy hates,
Union cemented for this nation's weal.
And even now, if to behold me here,
This day, amid these rites, this black-robed train,
Wakens, O Queen! remembrance in thy heart
Too wide at variance with the peace I seek—
I will not violate thy noble grief,
The prayer I came to urge I will defer.

Mer. This day, to-morrow, yesterday, alike
I am, I shall be, have been, in my mind
Tow'rd thee; toward thy silence as thy speech.
Speak, therefore, or keep silence, which thou wilt.

Pol. Hear me, then, speak; and let this mournful day,
The twentieth anniversary of strife,
Henceforth be honour'd as the date of peace.
Yes, twenty years ago this day beheld
The king Cresphontes, thy great husband, fall;
It needs no yearly offerings at his tomb

To keep alive that memory in my heart—
It lives, and, while I see the light, will live.
For we were kinsmen—more than kinsmen—friends;
Together we had grown, together lived;
Together to this isle of Pelops came
To take the inheritance of Heracles,
Together won this fair Messenian land—
Alas, that, how to rule it, was our broil!
He had his counsel, party, friends—I mine;
He stood by what he wish'd for—I the same;
I smote him, when our wishes clash'd in arms—
He had smit me, had he been swift as I.
But while I smote him, Queen, I honour'd him;
Me, too, had he prevail'd, he had not scorn'd.
Enough of this! Since that, I have maintain'd
The sceptre—not remissly let it fall—
And I am seated on a prosperous throne;
Yet still, for I conceal it not, ferments
In the Messenian people what remains
Of thy dead husband's faction—vigorous once,
Now crush'd but not quite lifeless by his fall.
And these men look to thee, and from thy grief—
Something too studiously, forgive me, shown—
Infer thee their accomplice; and they say
That thou in secret nurturest up thy son,
Him whom thou hiddest when thy husband fell,
To avenge that fall, and bring them back to power,
Such are their hopes—I ask not if by thee
Willingly fed or no—their most vain hopes;
For I have kept conspiracy fast-chain'd
Till now, and I have strength to chain it still.
But, Merope, the years advance;—I stand
Upon the threshold of old age, alone,
Always in arms, always in face of foes.

The long repressive attitude of rule
Leaves me austerer, sterner, than I would ;
Old age is more suspicious than the free
And valiant heart of youth, or manhood's firm
Unclouded reason ; I would not decline
Into a jealous tyrant, scourged with fears,
Closing in blood and gloom his sullen reign.
The cares which might in me with time, I feel,
Beget a cruel temper, help me quell!
The breech between our parties help me close!
Assist me to rule mildly ; let us join
Our hands in solemn union, making friends
Our factions with the friendship of their chiefs.
Let us in marriage, King and Queen, unite
Claims ever hostile else, and set thy son—
No more an exile fed on empty hopes,
And to an unsubstantial title heir,
But prince adopted by the will of power,
And future king—before this people's eyes.
Consider him! consider not old hates!
Consider, too, this people, who were dear
To their dead king, thy husband—yea, too dear,
For that destroy'd him. Give them peace! thou can'st.
O Merope, how many noble thoughts,
How many precious feelings of man's heart,
How many loves, how many gratitudes,
Do twenty years wear out, and see expire!
Shall they not wear one hatred out as well?

Mer. Thou hast forgot, then, who I am who hear,
And who thou art who speakest to me? I
Am Merope, thy murder'd master's wife ;
And thou art Polyphontes, first his friend,
And then . . . his murderer. These offending tears
That murder moves ; this breach that thou would'st close

Was by that murder open'd; that one child
(If still, indeed, he lives) whom thou would'st seat
Upon a throne not thine to give, is heir,
Because thou slew'st his brothers with their father.
Who can patch union here? What can there be
But everlasting horror 'twixt us two,
Gulfs of estranging blood? Across that chasm
Who can extend their hands? . . . Maidens, take back
These offerings home! our rites are spoil'd to-day.
Pol. Not so; let these Messenian maidens mark
The fear'd and blacken'd ruler of their race,
Albeit with lips unapt to self-excuse,
Blow off the spot of murder from his name.—
Murder!—but what *is* murder? When a wretch
For private gain or hatred takes a life,
We call it murder, crush him, brand his name.
But when, for some great public cause, an arm
Is, without love or hate, austerely raised
Against a power exempt from common checks,
Dangerous to all, to be but thus annull'd—
Ranks any man with murder such an act?
With grievous deeds, perhaps; with murder, no!
Find then such cause, the charge of murder falls—
Be judge thyself if it abound not here.
All know how weak the eagle, Heracles,
Soaring from his death-pile on Oeta, left
His puny, callow eaglets; and what trials—
Infirm protectors, dubious oracles
Construed awry, misplann'd invasions—wore
Three generations of his offspring out;
Hardly the fourth, with grievous loss, regain'd
Their fathers' realm, this isle, from Pelops named.
Who made that triumph, though deferr'd, secure?
Who, but the kinsmen of the royal brood

Of Heracles, scarce Heracleidae less
Than they? these, and the Dorian lords, whose king
Aegimius gave our outcast house a home
When Thebes, when Athens dared not; who in arms
Thrice issued with us from their pastoral vales,
And shed their blood like water in our cause?
Such were the dispossessors; of what stamp
Were they we dispossessed?—of us I speak,
Who to Messenia with thy husband came;
I speak not now of Argos, where his brother,
Not now of Sparta, where his nephews reign'd.—
What we found here were tribes of fame obscure,
Much turbulence, and little constancy,
Precariously ruled by foreign lords
From the Aeolian stock of Neleus sprung,
A house once great, now dwindling in its sons.
Such were the conquer'd, such the conquerors; who
Had most thy husband's confidence? Consult
His acts! the wife he chose was—full of virtues—
But an Arcadian princess, more akin
To his new subjects than to us; his friends
Were the Messenian chiefs; the laws he framed
Were aimed at their promotion, our decline.
And, finally, this land, then half-subdued,
Which from one central city's guarded seat
As from a fastness in the rocks our scant
Handful of Dorian conquerors might have curb'd,
He parcell'd out in five confederate states,
Sowing his victors thinly through them all,
Mere prisoners, meant or not, among our foes.
If this was fear of them, it shamed the king;
If jealousy of us, it shamed the man.
Long we refrain'd ourselves, submitted long,
Construed his acts indulgently, revered,

Though found perverse, the blood of Heracles;
Reluctantly the rest—but, against all,
One voice preach'd patience, and that voice was mine!
At last it reach'd us, that he, still mistrustful,
Deeming, as tyrants deem, our silence hate,
Unadulating grief conspiracy,
Had to this city, Stenyclaros, call'd
A general assemblage of the realm,
With compact in that concourse to deliver,
For death, his ancient to his new-made friends.
Patience was thenceforth self-destruction. I,
I his chief kinsman, I his pioneer
And champion to the throne, I honouring most
Of men the line of Heracles, preferr'd
The many of that lineage to the one;
What his foes dared not, I, his lover, dared;
I at that altar, where mid shouting crowds
He sacrificed, our ruin in his heart,
To Zeus, before he struck his blow, struck mine—
Struck once, and awed his mob, and saved this realm.
Murder let others call this, if they will;
I, self-defence and righteous execution.

Mer. Alas, how fair a colour can his tongue,
Who self-exculpates, lend to foulest deeds!
Thy trusting lord didst thou, his servant, slay;
Kinsman, thou slew'st thy kinsman; friend, thy friend—
This were enough; but let me tell thee, too,
Thou hadst no cause, as feign'd, in his misrule.
For ask at Argos, ask in Lacedaemon,
Whose people, when the Heracleidae came,
Were hunted out, and to Achaia fled,
Whether is better, to abide alone,
A wolfish band, in a dispeopled realm,
Or conquerors with conquer'd to unite

Into one puissant folk, as he design'd?
These sturdy and unworn Messenian tribes,
Who shook the fierce Neleidae on their throne,
Who to the invading Dorians stretch'd a hand,
And half bestow'd, half yielded up their soil—
He would not let his savage chiefs alight,
A cloud of vultures, on this vigorous race,
Ravin a little while in spoil and blood,
Then, gorged and helpless, be assail'd and slain.
He would have saved you from your furious selves.
Not in abhorr'd estrangement let you stand;
He would have mix'd you with your friendly foes,
Foes dazzled with your prowess, well inclined
To reverence your lineage, more, to obey;
So would have built you, in a few short years,
A just, therefore a safe, supremacy.
For well he knew, what you, his chiefs, did not—
How of all human rules the over-tense
Are apt to snap; the easy-stretch'd endure.
O gentle wisdom, little understood!
O arts above the vulgar tyrant's reach!
O policy too subtle far for sense
Of heady, masterful, injurious men!
This good he meant you, and for this he died!
Yet not for this—else might thy crime in part
Be error deem'd—but that pretence is vain.
For, if ye slew him for supposed misrule,
Injustice to his kin and Dorian friends,
Why with the offending father did ye slay
Two unoffending babes, his innocent sons?
Why not on them have placed the forfeit crown,
Ruled in their name, and train'd them to your will?
Had *they* misruled? had *they* forgot their friends,
Forsworn their blood? ungratefully had *they*

Preferr'd Messenian serfs to Dorian lords?
No! but to thy ambition their poor lives
Were bar—and this, too, was their father's crime.
That thou might'st reign he died, not for his fault
Even fancied; and his death thou wroughtest chief!
For, if the other lords desired his fall
Hotlier than thou, and were by thee kept back,
Why dost thou only profit by his death?
Thy crown condemns thee, while thy tongue absolves.
And now to me thou tenderest friendly league,
And to my son reversion to thy throne!
Short answer is sufficient; league with thee,
For me I deem such impious; and for him
Exile abroad more safe than heirship here.

Pol. I ask thee not to approve thy husband's death,
No, nor expect thee to admit the grounds,
In reason good, which justified my deed.
With women the heart argues, not the mind.
But, for thy children's death, I stand assoil'd—
I saved them, meant them honour; but thy friends
Rose, and with fire and sword assailed my house
By night; in that blind tumult they were slain.
To chance impute their deaths, then, not to me.

Mer. Such chance as kill'd the father, kill'd the sons.

Pol. One son at least I spared, for still he lives.

Mer. Tyrants think him they murder not they spare.

Pol. Not much a tyrant thy free speech displays me.

Mer. Thy shame secures my freedom, not thy will.

Pol. Shame rarely checks the genuine tyrant's will.

Mer. One merit, then, thou hast; exult in that.

Pol. Thou standest out, I see, repellest peace.

Mer. Thy sword repell'd it long ago, not I.

Pol. Doubtless thou reckonest on the help of friends.

Mer. Not help of men, although, perhaps, of Gods.

Pol. What Gods? the Gods of concord, civil weal?
Mer. No! the avenging Gods, who punish crime.
Pol. Beware! from thee upbraidings I receive
With pity, nay, with reverence; yet, beware!
I know, I know how hard it is to think
That right, that conscience pointed to a deed,
Where interest seems to have enjoin'd it too.
Most men are led by interest; and the few
Who are not, expiate the general sin,
Involved in one suspicion with the base.
Dizzy the path and perilous the way
Which in a deed like mine a just man treads,
But it is sometimes trodden, oh! believe it.
Yet how *canst* thou believe it? therefore thou
Hast all impunity. Yet, lest thy friends,
Embolden'd by my lenience, think it fear,
And count on like impunity, and rise,
And have to thank thee for a fall, beware!
To rule this kingdom I intend; with sway
Clement, if may be, but to rule it—there
Expect no wavering, no retreat, no change.
And now I leave thee to these rites, esteem'd
Pious, but impious, surely, if their scope
Be to foment old memories of wrath.
Pray, as thou pour'st libations on this tomb,
To be deliver'd from thy foster'd hate,
Unjust suspicion, and erroneous fear.

[POLYPHONTES *goes into the palace.* THE CHORUS *and* MEROPE *approach the tomb with their offerings.*

Chor. Draw, draw near to the tomb! *strophe.*
Lay honey-cakes on its marge,
Pour the libation of milk,
Deck it with garlands of flowers.

Tears fall thickly the while!
Behold, O King from the dark
House of the grave, what we do!

O Arcadian hills, *antistrophe*
Send us the Youth whom ye hide,
Girt with his coat for the chase,
With the low broad hat of the tann'd
Hunter o'ershadowing his brow;
Grasping firm, in his hand
Advanced, two javelins, not now
Dangerous alone to the deer!

Mer. What shall I bear, O lost *str.* 1.
Husband and King, to thy grave?—
Pure libations, and fresh
Flowers? But thou, in the gloom,
Discontented, perhaps,
Demandest vengeance, not grief?
Sternly requirest a man,
Light to spring up to thy house?

Chor. Vengeance, O Queen, is his due, *str.* 2.
His most just prayer; yet his house—
If that might soothe him below—
Prosperous, mighty, come back
In the third generation, the way
Order'd by Fate, to their home;
And now, glorious, secure,
Fill the wealth-giving thrones
Of their heritage, Pelops' isle.

Mer. Suffering sent them, Death *ant.* 1.
March'd with them, Hatred and Strife
Met them entering their halls.
For from the day when the first
Heracleidae received

That Delphic hest to return,
What hath involved them, but blind
Error on error, and blood?
Chor. Truly I hear of a Maid *ant.* 2.
Of that stock born, who bestow'd
Her blood that so she might make
Victory sure to her race,
When the fight hung in doubt! but she now,
Honour'd and sung of by all,
Far on Marathon plain,
Gives her name to the spring
Macaria, blessed Child.
Mer. She led the way of death. *str.* 3.
And the plain of Tegea,
And the grave of Orestes—
Where, in secret seclusion
Of his unreveal'd tomb,
Sleeps Agamemnon's unhappy,
Matricidal, world-famed,
Seven-cubit-statured son—
Sent forth Echemus, the victor, the king,
By whose hand, at the Isthmus,
At the fate-denied straits,
Fell the eldest of the sons of Heracles,
Hyllus, the chief of his house.
Brother follow'd sister
The all-wept way.
Chor. Yes; but his seed still, wiser-counsell'd,
Sail'd by the fate-meant Gulf to their conquest—
Slew their enemies' king, Tisamenus.
Wherefore accept that happier omen!
Yet shall restorer appear to the race.
Mer. Three brothers won the field, *ant.* 3.
And to two did Destiny

Give the thrones that they conquer'd.
But the third, what delays him
From his unattain'd crown? . . .
Ah Pylades and Electra,
Ever faithful, untired,
Jealous, blood-exacting friends!
Your sons leap upon the foe of your kin.
In the passes of Delphi,
In the temple-built gorge!
There the youngest of the band of conquerors
Perish'd, in sight of the goal.
Thrice son follow'd sire
The all-wept way.
Chor. Thou tellest the fate of the last *str.* 4
Of the three Heracleidae.
Not of him, of Cresphontes thou shared'st the lot!
A king, a king was he while he lived,
Swaying the sceptre with predestined hand;
And now, minister loved,
Holds rule.
Mer. Ah me . . . Ah . . .
Chor. For the awful Monarchs below.
Mer. Thou touchest the worst of my ills. *str.* 5.
Oh had he fallen of old
At the Isthmus, in fight with his foes,
By Achaian, Arcadian spear!
Then had his sepulchre risen
On the high sea-bank, in the sight
Of either Gulf, and remain'd
All-regarded afar,
Noble memorial of worth
Of a valiant Chief, to his own.
Chor. There rose up a cry in the streets *ant.* 5.
From the terrified people.

From the altar of Zeus, from the crowd, came a wail.
A blow, a blow was struck, and he fell,
Sullying his garment with dark-streaming blood;
While stood o'er him a Form—
Some Form
Mer. Ah me . . . Ah . . .
Chor. Of a dreadful Presence of fear.
Mer. More piercing the second cry rang, *ant.* 5.
Wail'd from the palace within,
From the Children. . . . The Fury to them,
Fresh from their father, draws near.
Ah bloody axe! dizzy blows!
In these ears, they thunder, they ring,
These poor ears, still! and these eyes
Night and day see them fall,
Fiery phantoms of death,
On the fair, curl'd heads of my sons.
Chor. Not to thee only hath come *str.* 6.
Sorrow, O Queen, of mankind.
Had not Electra to haunt
A palace defiled by a death unavenged,
For years, in silence, devouring her heart?
But her nursling, her hope, came at last.
Thou, too, rearest in hope,
Far 'mid Arcadian hills,
Somewhere, for vengeance, a champion, a light.
Soon, soon shall Zeus bring him home!
Soon shall he dawn on this land!
Mer. Him in secret, in tears, *str.* 7.
Month after month, I await
Vainly. For he, in the glens
Of Lycaeus afar,
A gladsome hunter of deer,
Basks in his morning of youth,

Spares not a thought to his home.
Chor. Give not thy heart to despair. *ant.* 6.
No lamentation can loose
Prisoners of death from the grave;
But Zeus, who accounteth thy quarrel his own,
Still rules, still watches, and numb'reth the hours
Till the sinner, the vengeance, be ripe.
Still, by Acheron stream,
Terrible Deities throned
Sit, and eye grimly the victim unscourged.
Still, still the Dorian boy,
Exiled, remembers his home.
Mer. Him if high-ruling Zeus *ant.* 7.
Bring to me safe, let the rest
Go as it will! But if this
Clash with justice, the Gods
Forgive my folly, and work
Vengeance on sinner and sin—
Only to me give my child!
Chor. Hear us and help us, Shade of our King! *str.* 8.
Mer. A return, O Father! give to thy boy! *str.* 9.
Chor. Send an avenger, Gods of the dead! *ant.* 8.
Mer. An avenger I ask not—send me my son! *ant.* 9.
Chor. O Queen, for an avenger to appear,
Thinking that so I pray'd aright, I pray'd;
If I pray'd wrongly, I revoke the prayer.
Mer. Forgive me, maidens, if I seem too slack
In calling vengeance on a murderer's head.
Impious I deem the alliance which he asks,
Requite him words severe for seeming kind,
And righteous, if he falls, I count his fall.
With this, to those unbribed inquisitors
Who in man's inmost bosom sit and judge,
The true avengers these, I leave his deed,

By him shown fair, but, I believe, most foul.
If these condemn him, let them pass his doom!
That doom obtain effect, from Gods or men!
So be it; yet will that more solace bring
To the chafed heart of Justice than to mine.
To hear another tumult in these streets,
To have another murder in these halls,
To see another mighty victim bleed—
Small comfort offers for a woman there!
A woman, O my friends, has one desire:
To see secure, to live with, those she loves.
Can vengeance give me back the murdered? no!
Can it bring home my child? Ah, if it can,
I pray the Furies' ever-restless band,
And pray the Gods, and pray the all-seeing sun:
'Sun, who careerest through the height of Heaven,
When o'er the Arcadian forests thou art come,
And see'st my stripling hunter there afield,
Put tightness in thy gold-embossed rein,
And check thy fiery steeds, and, leaning back,
Throw him a pealing word of summons down,
To come, a late avenger, to the aid
Of this poor soul who bare him, and his sire.'
If this will bring him back, be this my prayer!
But Vengeance travels in a dangerous way,
Double of issue, full of pits and snares
For all who pass, pursuers and pursued—
That way is dubious for a mother's prayer.
Rather on thee I call, Husband beloved—
May Hermes, herald of the dead, convey
My words below to thee, and make thee hear—
Bring back our son! if may be without blood!
Install him in thy throne, still without blood!
Grant him to reign there wise and just like thee,

More fortunate than thee, more fairly judged!
This for our son; and for myself I pray,
Soon, having once beheld him, to descend
Into the quiet gloom, where thou art now.
These words to thine indulgent ear, thy wife,
I send, and these libations pour the while.

[*They make their offerings at the tomb.* MEROPE *then turns to go towards the palace.*

Chor. The dead hath now his offerings duly paid.
But whither go'st thou hence, O Queen, away?
Mer. To receive Arcas, who to-day should come,
Bringing me of my boy the annual news.
Chor. No certain news if like the rest it run.
Mer. Certain in this, that 'tis uncertain still.
Chor. What keeps him in Arcadia from return?
Mer. His grandsire and his uncles fear the risk.
Chor. Of what? it lies with them to make risk none.
Mer. Discovery of a visit made by stealth.
Chor. With arms then they should send him, not by stealth.
Mer. With arms they dare not, and by stealth they fear.
Chor. I doubt their caution little suits their ward.
Mer. The heart of youth I know; that most I fear.
Chor. I augur thou wilt hear some bold resolve.
Mer. I dare not wish it; but, at least, to hear
That my son still survives, in health, in bloom;
To hear that still he loves, still longs for, me,
Yet, with a light uncareworn spirit, turns
Quick from distressful thought, and floats in joy—
Thus much from Arcas, my old servant true,
Who saved him from these murderous halls a babe,
And since has fondly watch'd him night and day
Save for this annual charge, I hope to hear.

If this be all, I know not; but I know,
These many years I live for this alone.

[MEROPE *goes in.*

Chor. Much is there which the sea *str.* 1.
Conceals from man, who cannot plumb its depths.
Air to his unwing'd form denies a way,
And keeps its liquid solitudes unscaled.
Even earth, whereon he treads,
So feeble is his march, so slow,
Holds countless tracts untrod.

But more than all unplumb'd, *ant.* 1.
Unscaled, untrodden, is the heart of man.
More than all secrets hid, the way it keeps.
Nor any of our organs so obtuse,
Inaccurate, and frail,
As those wherewith we try to test
Feelings and motives there.

Yea, and not only have we not explored *str.* 2.
That wide and various world, the heart of others,
But even our own heart, that narrow world
Bounded in our own breast, we hardly know,
Of our own actions dimly trace the causes.
Whether a natural obscureness, hiding
That region in perpetual cloud,
Or our own want of effort, be the bar.

Therefore—while acts are from their motives judged, *ant.* 2.
And to one act many most unlike motives,
This pure, that guilty, may have each impell'd—
Power fails us to try clearly if that cause
Assign'd us by the actor be the true one;
Power fails the man himself to fix distinctly
The cause which drew him to his deed,
And stamp himself, thereafter, bad or good.

The most are bad, wise men have said. *str.* 3.
Let the best rule, they say again.
The best, then, to dominion hath the right.
Rights unconceded and denied,
Surely, if rights, may be by force asserted—
May be, nay should, if for the general weal.
The best, then, to the throne may carve his way,
And strike opposers down,
Free from all guilt of lawlessness,
Or selfish lust of personal power;
Bent only to serve virtue,
Bent to diminish wrong.

And truly, in this ill-ruled world, *ant.* 3.
Well sometimes may the good desire
To give to virtue her dominion due!
Well may he long to interrupt
The reign of folly, usurpation ever,
Though fenced by sanction of a thousand years!
Well thirst to drag the wrongful ruler down;
Well purpose to pen back
Into the narrow path of right
The ignorant, headlong multitude,
Who blindly follow, ever,
Blind leaders, to their bane!

But who can say, without a fear: *str.* 1.
That best, who ought to rule, am I;
The mob, who ought to obey, are these;
I the one righteous, they the many bad?
Who, without check of conscience, can aver
That he to power makes way by arms,
Sheds blood, imprisons, banishes, attaints,
Commits all deeds the guilty oftenest do,

Without a single guilty thought,
Arm'd for right only, and the general good?

Therefore, with censure unallay'd, *ant.* 4.
Therefore, with unexcepting ban,
Zeus and pure-thoughted Justice brand
Imperious self-asserting violence;
Sternly condemn the too bold man, who dares
Elect himself Heaven's destined arm;
And, knowing well man's inmost heart infirm,
However noble the committer be,
His grounds however specious shown,
Turn with averted eyes from deeds of blood.

Thus, though a woman, I was school'd *epode.*
By those whom I revere.
Whether I learnt their lessons well,
Or, having learnt them, well apply
To what hath in this house befall'n,
If in the event be any proof,
The event will quickly show.

[Aepytus *comes in.*

Aep. Maidens, assure me if they told me true
Who told me that the royal house was here.

Chor. Rightly they told thee, and thou art arrived.

Aep. Here, then, it is, where Polyphontes dwells?

Chor. He doth; thou hast both house and master right.

Aep. Might some one straight inform him he is sought?

Chor. Inform him that thyself, for here he comes.

[Polyphontes *comes forth with* Attendants *and* Guards.

Aep. O King, all hail! I come with weighty news;
Most likely, grateful; but, in all case, sure.

Pol. Speak them, that I may judge their kind myself.

Aep. Accept them in one word, for good or bad:

Aepytus, the Messenian prince, is dead!
Pol. Dead!—and when died he? where? and by what hand?
And who art thou, who bringest me such news?
Aep. He perish'd in Arcadia, where he dwelt
With Cypselus; and two days since he died.
One of the train of Cypselus am I.
Pol. Instruct me of the manner of his death.
Aep. That will I do, and to this end I came
For, being of like age, of birth not mean,
The son of an Arcadian noble, I
Was chosen his companion from a boy;
And on the hunting-rambles which his heart,
Unquiet, drove him ever to pursue
Through all the lordships of the Arcadian dales,
From chief to chief, I wander'd at his side,
The captain of his squires, and his guard.
On such a hunting-journey, three morns since,
With beaters, hounds, and huntsmen, he and I
Set forth from Tegea, the royal town.
The prince at start seem'd sad, but his regard
Clear'd with blithe travel and the morning air.
We rode from Tegea, through the woods of oaks,
Past Arnê spring, where Rhea gave the babe
Poseidon to the shepherd-boys to hide
From Saturn's search among the new-yean'd lambs,
To Mantineia, with its unbaked walls;
Thence, by the Sea-God's Sanctuary and the tomb
Whither from wintry Maenalus were brought
The bones of Arcas, whence our race is named,
On, to the marshy Orchomenian plain,
And the Stone Coffins;—then, by Caphyae Cliffs,
To Pheneos with its craggy citadel.
There, with the chief of that hill-town, we lodged

One night; and the next day at dawn fared on
By the Three Fountains and the Adder's Hill
To the Stymphalian Lake, our journey's end,
To draw the coverts on Cyllenê's side.
There, on a high green spur which bathes its point
Far in the liquid lake, we sate, and drew
Cates from our hunters' pouch, Arcadian fare,
Sweet chestnuts, barley-cakes, and boar's-flesh dried;
And as we ate, and rested there, we talk'd
Of places we had pass'd, sport we had had,
Of beasts of chase that haunt the Arcadian hills,
Wild hog, and bear, and mountain-deer, and roe;
Last of our quarters with the Arcadian chiefs.
For courteous entertainment, welcome warm,
Sad, reverential homage, had our prince
From all, for his great lineage and his woes;
All which he own'd, and praised with grateful mind.
But still over his speech a gloom there hung,
As of one shadow'd by impending death;
And strangely, as we talk'd, he would apply
The story of spots mention'd to his own;
Telling us, Arnê minded him, he too
Was saved a babe, but to a life obscure,
Which he, the seed of Heracles, dragg'd on
Inglorious, and should drop at last unknown,
Even as those dead unepitaph'd, who lie
In the stone coffins at Orchomenus.
And, then, he bade remember how we pass'd
The Mantineän Sanctuary, forbid
To foot of mortal, where his ancestor,
Named Aepytus like him, having gone in,
Was blinded by the outgushing springs of brine.
Then, turning westward to the Adder's Hill—
Another ancestor, named, too, like me,

Died of a snake bite, said he, *on that brow;*
Still at his mountain-tomb men marvel, built
Where, as life ebb'd, his bearers laid him down.
So he play'd on; then ended, with a smile:
This region is not happy for my race.
We cheer'd him; but, that moment, from the copse
By the lake-edge, broke the sharp cry of hounds;
The prickers shouted that the stag was gone.
We sprang upon our feet, we snatch'd our spears,
We bounded down the swarded slope, we plunged
Through the dense ilex-thickets to the dogs.
Far in the woods ahead their music rang;
And many times that morn we coursed in ring
The forests round that belt Cyllenê's side;
Till I, thrown out and tired, came to halt
On that same spur where we had sate at morn.
And resting there to breathe, I watch'd the chase—
Rare, straggling hunters, foil'd by brake and crag,
And the prince, single, pressing on the rear
Of that unflagging quarry and the hounds.
Now in the woods far down I saw them cross
An open glade; now he was high aloft
On some tall scar fringed with dark feathery pines,
Peering to spy a goat-track down the cliff,
Cheering with hand, and voice, and horn his dogs.
At last the cry drew to the water's edge—
And through the brushwood, to the pebbly strand,
Broke, black with sweat, the antler'd mountain-stag,
And took the lake. Two hounds alone pursued,
Then came the prince; he shouted and plunged in.
—There is a chasm rifted in the base
Of that unfooted precipice, whose rock
Walls on one side the deep Stymphalian Lake;
There the lake-waters, which in ages gone

Wash'd, as the marks upon the hills still show,
All the Stymphalian plain, are now suck'd down.
A headland, with one aged plane-tree crown'd,
Parts from this cave-pierced cliff the shelving bay
Where first the chase plunged in ; the bay is smooth,
But round the headland's point a current sets,
Strong, black, tempestuous, to the cavern-mouth.
Stoutly, under the headland's lee, they swam ;
But when they came abreast the point, the race
Caught them as wind takes feathers, whirl'd them round
Struggling in vain to cross it, swept them on,
Stag, dogs, and hunter, to the yawning gulph.
All this, O King, not piecemeal, as to thee
Now told, but in one flashing instant pass'd.
While from the turf whereon I lay I sprang
And took three strides, quarry and dogs were gone ;
A moment more—I saw the prince turn round
Once in the black and arrowy race, and cast
An arm aloft for help ; then sweep beneath
The low-brow'd cavern-arch, and disappear.
And what I could, I did—to call by cries
Some straggling hunters to my aid, to rouse
Fishers who live on the lake-side, to launch
Boats, and approach, near as we dared, the chasm.
But of the prince nothing remain'd, save this,
His boar-spear's broken shaft, back on the lake
Cast by the rumbling subterranean stream ;
And this, at landing spied by us and saved,
His broad-brimm'd hunter's hat, which, in the bay,
Where first the stag took water, floated still.
And I across the mountains brought with haste
To Cypselus, at Basilis, this news—
Basilis, his new city, which he now
Near Lycosura builds, Lycaon's town,

First city founded on the earth by men.
He to thee sends me on, in one thing glad,
While all else grieves him, that his grandchild's death
Extinguishes distrust 'twixt him and thee.
But I from our deplored mischance learn this:
The man who to untimely death is doom'd,
Vainly you hedge him from the assault of harm;
He bears the seed of ruin in himself.

Chor. So dies the last shoot of our royal tree!
Who shall tell Merope this heavy news?

Pol. Stranger, this news thou bringest is too great
For instant comment, having many sides
Of import, and in silence best received,
Whether it turn at last to joy or woe.
But thou, the zealous bearer, hast no part
In what it hath of painful, whether now,
First heard, or in its future issue shown.
Thou for thy labour hast deserved our best
Refreshment, needed by thee, as I judge,
With mountain-travel and night-watching spent.—
To the guest-chamber lead him, some one! give
All entertainment which a traveller needs,
And such as fits a royal house to show;
To friends, still more, and labourers in our cause.

[ATTENDANTS *conduct* AEPYTUS *within the palace.*

Chor. The youth is gone within; alas! he bears
A presence sad for some one through those doors.

Pol. Admire then, maidens, how in one short hour
The schemes, pursued in vain for twenty years,
Are—by a stroke, though undesired, complete—
Crown'd with success, not in my way, but Heaven's!
This at a moment, too, when I had urged
A last, long cherish'd project, in my aim
Of peace, and been repulsed with hate and scorn.

Fair terms of reconcilement, equal rule,
I offer'd to my foes, and they refused;
Worse terms than mine they have obtain'd from Heaven.
Dire is this blow for Merope; and I
Wish'd, truly wish'd, solution to our broil
Other than by this death; but it hath come!
I speak no word of boast, but this I say:
A private loss here founds a nation's peace.

[POLYPHONTES *goes out.*

Chor. Peace, who tarriest too long; *str.*
Peace, with delight in thy train;
Come, come back to our prayer!
Then shall the revel again
Visit our streets, and the sound
Of the harp be heard with the pipe,
When the flashing torches appear
In the marriage-train coming on,
With dancing maidens and boys—
While the matrons come to the doors,
And the old men rise from their bench,
When the youths bring home the bride.

Not condemn'd by my voice *ant.*
He who restores thee shall be,
Not unfavour'd by Heaven.
Surely no sinner the man,
Dread though his acts, to whose hand
Such a boon to bring hath been given.
Let her come, fair Peace! let her come!
But the demons long nourish'd here,
Murder, Discord, and Hate,
In the stormy desolate waves
Of the Thracian Sea let her leave,
Or the howling outermost main! [MEROPE *comes forth.*

Mer. A whisper through the palace flies of one
Arrived from Tegea with weighty news;
And I came, thinking to find Arcas here.
Ye have not left this gate, which he must pass;
Tell me—hath one not come? or, worse mischance,
Come, but been intercepted by the King?
Chor. A messenger, sent from Arcadia here,
Arrived, and of the King had speech but now.
Mer. Ah me! the wrong expectant got his news.
Chor. The message brought was for the King design'd.
Mer. How so? was Arcas not the messenger?
Chor. A younger man, and of a different name.
Mer. And what Arcadian news had he to tell?
Chor. Learn that from other lips, O Queen, than mine.
Mer. He kept his tale, then, for the King alone?
Chor. His tale was meeter for that ear than thine.
Mer. Why dost thou falter, and make half reply?
Chor. O thrice unhappy, how I groan thy fate!
Mer. Thou frightenest and confound'st me by thy words.
O were but Arcas come, all would be well!
Chor. If so, all 's well: for look, the old man speeds
Up from the city tow'rd this gated hill.

[Arcas *comes in.*

Mer. Not with the failing breath and foot of age
My faithful follower comes. Welcome, old friend!
Arc. Faithful, not welcome, when my tale is told.
O that my over-speed and bursting grief
Had on the journey choked my labouring breath,
And lock'd my speech for ever in my breast!
Yet then another man would bring this news,
Wherewith from end to end Arcadia rings.—
O honour'd Queen, thy son, my charge, is gone.
Chor. Too suddenly thou tellest such a loss.
Look up, O Queen! look up, O mistress dear!

Look up, and see thy friends who comfort thee.
Mer. Ah . . . Ah . . . Ah me!
Chor. And I, too, say, ah me!
Arc. Forgive, forgive the bringer of such news!
Mer. Better from thine than from an enemy's tongue.
Chor. And yet no enemy did this, O Queen:
But the wit-baffling will and hand of Heaven.
Arc. No enemy! and what hast thou, then, heard?
Swift as I came, hath falsehood been before?
Chor. A youth arrived but now—the son, he said,
Of an Arcadian lord—our prince's friend—
Jaded with travel, clad in hunter's garb.
He brought report that his own eyes had seen
The prince, in chase after a swimming stag,
Swept down a chasm rifted in the cliff
Which hangs o'er the Stymphalian Lake, and drown'd.
Arc. Ah me! with what a foot doth treason post,
While loyalty, with all her speed, is slow!
Another tale, I trow, thy messenger
For the King's private ear reserves, like this
In one thing only, that the prince is dead.
Chor. And how then runs this true and private tale?
Arc. As much to the King's wish, more to his shame.
This young Arcadian noble, guard and mate
To Aepytus, the king seduced with gold,
And had him at the prince's side in leash,
Ready to slip on his unconscious prey.
He on a hunting party two days since,
Among the forest on Cyllenê's side,
Perform'd good service for his bloody wage;
Our prince, and the good Laias, whom his ward
Had in a father's place, he basely murder'd.
'Tis so, 'tis so, alas, for see the proof:
Uncle and nephew disappear; their death

Is charged against this stripling ; agents, fee'd
To ply 'twixt the Messenian king and him,
Come forth, denounce the traffic and the traitor.
Seized, he escapes—and next I find him here.
Take this for true, the other tale for feign'd.
Chor. The youth, thou say'st, we saw and heard but now—
Arc. He comes to tell his prompter he hath sped.
Chor. Still he repeats the drowning story here.
Arc. To thee—that needs no Oedipus to explain.
Chor. Interpret, then ; for we, it seems, are dull.
Arc. Your King desired the profit of his death,
Not the black credit of his murderer.
That stern word '*murder*' had too dread a sound
For the Messenian hearts, who loved the prince.
Chor. Suspicion grave I see, but no firm proof.
Mer. Peace ! peace ! all 's clear.—The wicked watch and work
While the good sleep ; the workers have the day.
Yes ! yes ! now I conceive the liberal grace
Of this far-scheming tyrant, and his boon
Of heirship to his kingdom for my son :
He had his murderer ready, and the sword
Lifted, and that unwish'd-for heirship void—
A tale, meanwhile, forged for his subjects' ears—
And me, henceforth sole rival with himself
In their allegiance, me, in my son's death-hour,
When all turn'd tow'rds me, me he would have shown
To my Messenians, duped, disarm'd, despised,
The willing sharer of his guilty rule,
All claim to succour forfeit, to myself
Hateful, by each Messenian heart abhorr'd.
His offers I repell'd—but what of that ?
If with no rage, no fire of righteous hate

Such as ere now hath spurr'd to fearful deeds
Weak women with a thousandth part my wrongs,
But calm, but unresentful, I endured
His offers, coldly heard them, cold repell'd?
How must men think me abject, void of heart,
While all this time I bear to linger on
In this blood-deluged palace, in whose halls
Either a vengeful Fury I should stalk,
Or else not live at all!—but here I haunt,
A pale, unmeaning ghost, powerless to fright
Or harm, and nurse my longing for my son,
A helpless one, I know it—but the Gods
Have temper'd me e'en thus, and, in some souls,
Misery, which rouses others, breaks the spring.
And even now, my son, ah me! my son,
Fain would I fade away, as I have lived,
Without a cry, a struggle, or a blow,
All vengeance unattempted, and descend
To the invisible plains, to roam with thee,
Fit denizen, the lampless under-world—
But with what eyes should I encounter there
My husband, wandering with his stern compeers,
Amphiaraos, or Mycenae's king,
Who led the Greeks to Ilium, Agamemnon,
Betray'd like him, but, not like him, avenged?
Or with what voice shall I the questions meet
Of my two elder sons, slain long ago,
Who sadly ask me, what, if not revenge,
Kept me, their mother, from their side so long?
Or how reply to thee, my child last-born,
Last-murder'd, who reproachfully wilt say:
Mother, I well believed thou lived'st on
In the detested palace of thy foe
With patience on thy face, death in thy heart,

Counting, till I grew up, the laggard years,
That our joint hands might then together pay
To our unhappy house the debt we owe.
My death makes my debt void, and doubles thine—
But down thou fleest here, and leav'st our scourge
Triumphant, and condemnest all our race
To lie in gloom for ever unappeased.
What shall I have to answer to such words?—
No, something must be dared; and, great as erst
Our dastard patience, be our daring now!
Come, ye swift Furies, who to him ye haunt
Permit no peace till your behests are done;
Come Hermes, who dost friend the unjustly kill'd,
And can'st teach simple ones to plot and feign;
Come, lightning Passion, that with foot of fire
Advancest to the middle of a deed
Almost before 'tis plann'd; come, glowing Hate;
Come, baneful Mischief, from thy murky den
Under the dripping black Tartarean cliff
Which Styx's awful waters trickle down—
Inspire this coward heart, this flagging arm!
How say ye, maidens, do ye know these prayers?
Are these words Merope's—is this voice mine?
Old man, old man, thou had'st my boy in charge,
And he is lost, and thou hast that to atone!
Fly, find me on the instant where confer
The murderer and his impious setter-on—
And ye, keep faithful silence, friends, and mark
What one weak woman can achieve alone.

Arc. O mistress, by the Gods, do nothing rash!

Mer. Unfaithful servant, dost thou, too, desert me?

Arc. I go! I go!—the King holds council—there
Will I seek tidings. Take, the while, this word:
Attempting deeds beyond thy power to do,

Thou nothing profitest thy friends, but mak'st
Our misery more, and thine own ruin sure.

[ARCAS *goes out.*

Chor. I have heard, O Queen, how a prince, *str.* 1.
Agamemnon's son, in Mycenae,
Orestes, died but in name,
Lived for the death of his foes.
Mer. Peace!
Chor. What is it?
Mer. Alas,
Thou destroyest me!
Chor. How?
Mer. Whispering hope of a life
Which no stranger unknown,
But the faithful servant and nurse,
Whose tears warrant his truth,
Bears sad witness is lost.
Chor. Wheresoe'er men are, there is grief. *ant.* 1.
In a thousand countries, a thousand
Homes, e'en now is there wail;
Mothers lamenting their sons.
Mer. Yes——
Chor. Thou knowest it?
Mer. This,
Who lives, witnesses.
Chor. True.
Mer. But is it only a fate
Sure, all-common, to lose
In a land of friends, by a friend,
One last, murder-saved child?
Chor. Ah me! *str.* 2.
Mer. Thou confessest the prize
In the rushing, thundering, mad,
Cloud-enveloped, obscure,

Unapplauded, unsung
Race of calamity, mine?
Chor. None can truly claim that
Mournful preëminence, not
Thou.
Mer. Fate *gives* it, ah me!
Chor. Not, above all, in the doubts,
Double and clashing, that hang——
Mer. What then? *ant.* 2.
Seems it lighter, my loss,
If, perhaps, unpierced by the sword,
My child lies in his jagg'd
Sunless prison of rock,
On the black wave borne to and fro?
Chor. Worse, far worse, if his friend,
If the Arcadian within,
If——
Mer. (*with a start*). How say'st thou? within?
Chor. He in the guest-chamber now,
Faithlessly murder'd his friend.
Mer. Ye, too, ye, too, join to betray, then
Your Queen!
Chor. What is this?
Mer. Ye knew,
O false friends! into what
Haven the murderer had dropp'd?
Ye kept silence?
Chor. In fear,
O loved mistress! in fear,
Dreading thine over-wrought mood,
What I know, I conceal'd.
Mer. Swear by the Gods henceforth to obey me!
Chor. Unhappy one, what deed
Purposes thy despair?

I promise; but I fear.
Mer. From the altar, the unavenged tomb,
Fetch me the sacrifice-axe!——

[THE CHORUS *go towards the tomb of* CRESPHONTES, *and their leader brings back the axe.*

O Husband, O clothed
With the grave's everlasting,
All-covering darkness! O King,
Well-mourn'd, but ill-avenged!
Approv'st thou thy wife now?——
The axe!—who brings it?
Chor. 'Tis here!
But thy gesture, thy look,
Appals me, shakes me with awe.
Mer. Thrust back now the bolt of that door!
Chor. Alas! alas!—
Behold the fastenings withdrawn
Of the guest-chamber door!—
Ah! I beseech thee—with tears——
Mer. Throw the door open!
Chor. 'Tis done! . . .

[*The door of the house is thrown open: the interior of the guest-chamber is discovered, with* AEPYTUS *asleep on a couch.*

Mer. He sleeps—sleeps calm. O ye all-seeing Gods!
Thus peacefully do ye let sinners sleep,
While troubled innocents toss, and lie awake?
What sweeter sleep than this could I desire
For thee, my child, if thou wert yet alive?
How often have I dream'd of thee like this,
With thy soil'd hunting-coat, and sandals torn,
Asleep in the Arcadian glens at noon,
Thy head droop'd softly, and the golden curls

Clustering o'er thy white forehead, like a girl's;
The short proud lip showing thy race, thy cheeks
Brown'd with thine open-air, free, hunter's life.
Ah me!
And where dost thou sleep now, my innocent boy?—
In some dark fir-tree's shadow, amid rocks
Untrodden, on Cyllenê's desolate side;
Where travellers never pass, where only come
Wild beasts, and vultures sailing overhead.
There, there thou liest now, my hapless child!
Stretch'd among briars and stones, the slow, black gore
Oozing through thy soak'd hunting-shirt, with limbs
Yet stark from the death-struggle, tight-clench'd hands,
And eyeballs staring for revenge in vain.
Ah miserable!
And thou, thou fair-skinn'd Serpent! thou art laid
In a rich chamber, on a happy bed,
In a king's house, thy victim's heritage;
And drink'st untroubled slumber, to sleep off
The toils of thy foul service, till thou wake
Refresh'd, and claim thy master's thanks and gold.—
Wake up in hell from thine unhallow'd sleep,
Thou smiling Fiend, and claim thy guerdon there!
Wake amid gloom, and howling, and the noise
Of sinners pinion'd on the torturing wheel,
And the stanch Furies' never-silent scourge,
And bid the chief tormentors there provide
For a grand culprit shortly coming down.
Go thou the first, and usher in thy lord!
A more just stroke than that thou gav'st my son
Take——

[MEROPE *advances towards the sleeping* AEPYTUS, *with the axe uplifted. At the same moment* ARCAS *re-enters.*

Arc. (*to the Chorus*). Not with him to council did the King

Carry his messenger, but left him here.
[*Sees* MEROPE *and* AEPYTUS.
O Gods! . . .
Mer. Foolish old man, thou spoil'st my blow!
Arc. What do I see? . . .
Mer. A murderer at death's door.
Therefore no words!
Arc. A murderer? . . .
Mer. And a captive
To the dear next-of-kin of him he murder'd.
Stand, and let vengeance pass!
Arc. Hold, O Queen, hold!
Thou know'st not whom thou strik'st . . .
Mer. I know his crime.
Arc. Unhappy one! thou strik'st——
Mer. A most just blow.
Arc. No, by the Gods, thou slay'st——
Mer. Stand off!
Arc. Thy son!
Mer. Ah! . . .
[*She lets the axe drop, and falls insensible.*
Aep. (*awaking*). Who are these? What shrill, ear-piercing scream
Wakes me thus kindly from the perilous sleep
Wherewith fatigue and youth had bound mine eyes,
Even in the deadly palace of my foe?—
Arcas! Thou here?
Arc. (*embracing him*). O my dear master! O
My child, my charge beloved, welcome to life!
As dead we held thee, mourn'd for thee as dead.
Aep. In word I died, that I in deed might live.
But who are these?
Arc. Messenian maidens, friends.
Aep. And, Arcas!—but I tremble!

Arc. Boldly ask.
Aep. That black-robed, swooning figure? . . .
Arc. Merope.
Aep. O mother! mother!
Mer. Who upbraids me? Ah! . . .
[*seeing the axe.*
Aep. Upbraids thee? no one.
Mer. Thou dost well: but take . . .
Aep. What wav'st thou off?
Mer. That murderous axe away!
Aep. Thy son is here.
Mer. One said so, sure, but now.
Aep. Here, here thou hast him!
Mer. Slaughter'd by his hand! . . .
Aep. No, by the Gods, alive and like to live!
Mer. What, thou?—I dream——
Aep. May'st thou dream ever so!
Mer. (*advancing towards him*). My child? unhurt? . . .
Aep. Only by over-joy.
Mer. Art thou, then, come? . . .
Aep. Never to part again.

[*They fall into one another's arms. Then* MEROPE, *holding* AEPYTUS *by the hand, turns to* THE CHORUS.

Mer. O kind Messenian maidens, O my friends,
Bear witness, see, mark well, on what a head
My first stroke of revenge had nearly fallen!
Chor. We see, dear mistress: and we say, the Gods,
As hitherto they kept him, keep him now.
Mer. O my son!
I have, I have thee . . . the years
Fly back, my child! and thou seem'st
Ne'er to have gone from these eyes,
Never been torn from this breast.
Aep. Mother, my heart runs over; but the time

Presses me, chides me, will not let me weep.
Mer. Fearest thou now?
Aep. I fear not, but I think on my design.
Mer. At the undried fount of this breast,
A babe, thou smilest again.
Thy brothers play at my feet,
Early-slain innocents! near,
Thy kind-speaking father stands.
Aep. Remember, to revenge his death I come!
Mer. Ah . . . revenge!
That word! it kills me! I see
Once more roll back on my house,
Never to ebb, the accurst
All-flooding ocean of blood.
Aep. Mother, sometimes the justice of the Gods
Appoints the way to peace through shedding blood.
Mer. Sorrowful peace!
Aep. And yet the only peace to us allow'd.
Mer. From the first-wrought vengeance is born
A long succession of crimes.
Fresh blood flows, calling for blood.
Fathers, sons, grandsons, are all
One death-dealing vengeful train.
Aep. Mother, thy fears are idle; for I come
To close an old wound, not to open new.
In all else willing to be taught, in this
Instruct me not; I have my lesson clear.—
Arcas, seek out my uncle Laias, now
Conferring in the city with our friends;
Here bring him, ere the king come back from council,
That, how to accomplish what the Gods enjoin,
And the slow-ripening time at last prepares,
We two with thee, my mother, may consult;
For whose help dare I count on, if not thine?

Mer. Approves my brother Laias this intent?
Aep. Yes, and alone is with me here to share.
Mer. And what of thine Arcadian mate, who bears
Suspicion from thy grandsire of thy death,
For whom, as I suppose, thou passest here?
Aep. Sworn to our plot he is; if false surmise
Fix him the author of my death, I know not.
Mer. Proof, not surmise, shows him in commerce close—
Aep. With this Messenian tyrant—that I know.
Mer. And entertain'st thou, child, such dangerous friends?
Aep. This commerce for my best behoof he plies.
Mer. That thou may'st read thine enemy's counsel plain?
Aep. Too dear his secret wiles have cost our house.
Mer. And of his unsure agent what demands he?
Aep. News of my business, pastime, temper, friends.
Mer. His messages, then, point not to thy murder?
Aep. Not yet, though such, no doubt, his final aim.
Mer. And what Arcadian helpers bring'st thou here?
Aep. Laias alone; no errand mine for crowds.
Mer. On what relying, to crush such a foe?
Aep. One sudden stroke, and the Messenians' love.
Mer. O thou long-lost, long seen in dreams alone,
But now seen face to face, my only child!
Why wilt thou fly to lose as soon as found,
My new-won treasure, thy belovèd life?
Or how expectest not to lose, who com'st
With such slight means to cope with such a foe?
Thine enemy thou know'st not, nor his strength.
The stroke thou purposest is desperate, rash—
Yet grant that it succeeds—thou hast behind
The stricken king a second enemy
Scarce dangerous less than him, the Dorian lords.
These are not now the savage band who erst
Follow'd thy father from their northern hills,

Mere ruthless and uncounsell'd wolves of war,
Good to obey, without a leader nought.
Their chief hath train'd them, made them like himself,
Sagacious, men of iron, watchful, firm,
Against surprise and sudden panic proof.
Their master fall'n, these will not flinch, but band
To keep their master's power; thou wilt find
Behind his corpse their hedge of serried spears.
But, to match these, thou hast the people's love?
On what a reed, my child, thou leanest there!
Knowest thou not how timorous, how unsure,
How useless an ally a people is
Against the one and certain arm of power?
Thy father perish'd in this people's cause,
Perish'd before their eyes, yet no man stirr'd!
For years, his widow, in their sight I stand,
A never-changing index to revenge—
What help, what vengeance, at their hands have I?—
At least, if thou wilt trust them, try them first.
Against the King himself array the host
Thou countest on to back thee 'gainst his lords;
First rally the Messenians to thy cause,
Give them cohesion, purpose, and resolve,
Marshal them to an army—then advance,
Then try the issue; and not, rushing on
Single and friendless, give to certain death
That dear-beloved, that young, that gracious head.
Be guided, O my son! spurn counsel not!
For know thou this, a violent heart hath been
Fatal to all the race of Heracles.

Chor. With sage experience she speaks; and thou,
O Aepytus, weigh well her counsel given.

Aep. Ill counsel, in my judgement, gives she here,
Maidens, and reads experience much amiss;

Discrediting the succour which our cause
Might from the people draw, if rightly used;
Advising us a course which would, indeed,
If follow'd, make their succour slack and null.
A people is no army, train'd to fight,
A passive engine, at their general's will;
And, if so used, proves, as thou say'st, unsure.
A people, like a common man, is dull,
Is lifeless, while its heart remains untouch'd;
A fool can drive it, and a fly may scare.
When it admires and loves, its heart awakes:
Then irresistibly it lives, it works;
A people, then, is an ally indeed—
It is ten thousand fiery wills in one.
Now I, if I invite them to run risk
Of life for my advantage, and myself,
Who chiefly profit, run no more than they—
How shall I rouse their love, their ardour so?
But, if some signal, unassisted stroke,
Dealt at my own sole risk, before their eyes,
Announces me their rightful prince return'd—
The undegenerate blood of Heracles—
The daring claimant of a perilous throne—
How might not such a sight as this revive
Their loyal passion tow'rd my father's house,
Kindle their hearts, make them no more a mob,
A craven mob, but a devouring fire?
Then might I use them, then, for one who thus
Spares not himself, themselves they will not spare.
Haply, had but one daring soul stood forth
To rally them and lead them to revenge,
When my great father fell, they had replied!
Alas! our foe alone stood forward then.
And thou, my mother, hadst thou made a sign—

Hadst thou, from thy forlorn and captive state
Of widowhood in these polluted halls,
Thy prison-house, raised one imploring cry—
Who knows but that avengers thou hadst found?
But mute thou sat'st, and each Messenian heart
In thy despondency desponded too.
Enough of this!—Though not a finger stir
To succour me in my extremest need;
Though all free spirits in this land were dead,
And only slaves and tyrants left alive;
Yet for me, mother, I had liefer die
On native ground, than drag the tedious hours
Of a protected exile any more.
Hate, duty, interest, passion call one way;
Here stand I now, and the attempt shall be.

Chor. Prudence is on the other side; but deeds
Condemn'd by prudence have sometimes gone well.

Mer. Not till the ways of prudence all are tried,
And tried in vain, the turn of rashness comes.
Thou leapest to thy deed, and hast not ask'd
Thy kinsfolk and thy father's friends for aid.

Aep. And to what friends should I for aid apply?

Mer. The royal race of Temenus, in Argos——

Aep. That house, like ours, intestine murder maims.

Mer. Thy Spartan cousins, Procles and his brother——

Aep. Love a won cause, but not a cause to win.

Mer. My father, then, and his Arcadian chiefs——

Aep. Mean still to keep aloof from Dorian broil.

Mer. Wait, then, until sufficient help appears.

Aep. Orestes in Mycenae had no more.

Mer. He to fulfil an order raised his hand.

Aep. What order more precise had he than I?

Mer. Apollo peal'd it from his Delphian cave.

Aep. A mother's murder needed hest divine.

Mer. He had a hest, at least, and thou hast none.
Aep. The Gods command not where the heart speaks clear.
Mer. Thou wilt destroy, I see, thyself and us.
Aep. O suffering! O calamity! how ten,
How twentyfold worse are ye, when your blows
Not only wound the sense, but kill the soul,
The noble thought, which is alone the man!
That I, to-day returning, find myself
Orphan'd of both my parents—by his foes
My father, by your strokes my mother slain!
For this is not my mother, who dissuades,
At the dread altar of her husband's tomb,
His son from vengeance on his murderer;
And not alone dissuades him, but compares
His just revenge to an unnatural deed,
A deed so awful, that the general tongue,
Fluent of horrors, falters to relate it—
Of darkness so tremendous, that its author,
Though to his act empower'd, nay, impell'd,
By the oracular sentence of the Gods,
Fled, for years after, o'er the face of earth,
A frenzied wanderer, a God-driven man,
And hardly yet, some say, hath found a grave—
With such a deed as *this* thou matchest mine,
Which Nature sanctions, which the innocent blood
Clamours to find fulfill'd, which good men praise,
And only bad men joy to see undone!
O honour'd father! hide thee in thy grave
Deep as thou canst, for hence no succour comes;
Since from thy faithful subjects what revenge
Canst thou expect, when thus thy widow fails?
Alas! an adamantine strength indeed,
Past expectation, hath thy murderer built;
For this is the true strength of guilty kings,

When they corrupt the souls of those they rule.
Chor. Zeal makes him most unjust; but, in good time,
Here, as I guess, the noble Laias comes.
Lai. Break off, break off your talking, and depart
Each to his post, where the occasion calls;
Lest from the council-chamber presently
The King return, and find you prating here.
A time will come for greetings; but to-day
The hour for words is gone, is come for deeds.
Aep. O princely Laias! to what purpose calls
The occasion, if our chief confederate fails?
My mother stands aloof, and blames our deed.
Lai. My royal sister? . . . but, without some cause,
I know, she honours not the dead so ill.
Mer. Brother, it seems thy sister must present,
At this first meeting after absence long,
Not welcome, exculpation to her kin;
Yet exculpation needs it, if I seek,
A woman and a mother, to avert
Risk from my new-restored, my only son!—
Sometimes, when he was gone, I wish'd him back,
Risk what he might; now that I have him here,
Now that I feed mine eyes on that young face,
Hear that fresh voice, and clasp that gold-lock'd head,
I shudder, Laias, to commit my child
To murder's dread arena, where I saw
His father and his ill-starr'd brethren fall!
I loathe for him the slippery way of blood;
I ask if bloodless means may gain his end.
In me the fever of revengeful hate,
Passion's first furious longing to imbrue
Our own right hand in the detested blood
Of enemies, and count their dying groans—
If in this feeble bosom such a fire

Did ever burn—is long by time allay'd,
And I would now have Justice strike, not me.
Besides—for from my brother and my son
I hide not even this—the reverence deep,
Remorseful, tow'rd my hostile solitude,
By Polyphontes never fail'd-in once
Through twenty years; his mournful anxious zeal
To efface in me the memory of his crime—
Though it efface not that, yet makes me wish
His death a public, not a personal act,
Treacherously plotted 'twixt my son and me;
To whom this day he came to proffer peace,
Treaty, and to this kingdom for my son
Heirship, with fair intent, as I believe.—
For that he plots thy death, account it false;
[*to* Aepytus.
Number it with the thousand rumours vain,
Figments of plots, wherewith intriguers fill
The enforcèd leisure of an exile's ear.
Immersed in serious state-craft is the King,
Bent above all to pacify, to rule,
Rigidly, yet in settled calm, this realm;
Not prone, all say, averse to bloodshed now.—
So much is due to truth, even tow'rds our foe.
[*to* Laias.
Do I, then, give to usurpation grace,
And from his natural rights my son debar?
Not so! let him—and none shall be more prompt
Than I to help—raise his Messenian friends;
Let him fetch succours from Arcadia, gain
His Argive or his Spartan cousins' aid;
Let him do this, do aught but recommence
Murder's uncertain, secret, perilous game—
And I, when to his righteous standard down

Flies Victory wing'd, and Justice raises *then*
Her sword, will be the first to bid it fall.
If, haply, at this moment, such attempt
Promise not fair, let him a little while
Have faith, and trust the future and the Gods.
He may; for never did the Gods allow
Fast permanence to an ill-gotten throne.—
These are but woman's words—yet, Laias, thou
Despise them not! for, brother, thou and I
Were not among the feuds of warrior-chiefs,
Each sovereign for his dear-bought hour, born;
But in the pastoral Arcadia rear'd,
With Cypselus our father, where we saw
The simple patriarchal state of kings,
Where sire to son transmits the unquestion'd crown,
Unhack'd, unsmirch'd, unbloodied, and have learnt
That spotless hands unshaken sceptres hold.
Having learnt this, then, use thy knowledge now.

Chor. Which way to lean I know not: bloody strokes
Are never free from doubt, though sometimes due.

Lai. O Merope, the common heart of man
Agrees to deem some deeds so dark in guilt,
That neither gratitude, nor tie of race,
Womanly pity, nor maternal fear,
Nor any pleader else, shall be indulged
To breathe a syllable to bar revenge.
All this, no doubt, thou to thyself hast urged—
Time presses, so that theme forbear I now;
Direct to thy dissuasions I reply.
Blood-founded thrones, thou say'st, are insecure;
Our father's kingdom, because pure, is safe.
True; but what cause to our Arcadia gives
Its privileged immunity from blood,
But that, since first the black and fruitful Earth

In the primeval mountain-forests bore
Pelasgus, our forefather and mankind's,
Legitimately sire to son, with us,
Bequeaths the allegiance of our shepherd-tribes,
More loyal, as our line continues more?—
How can your Heracleidan chiefs inspire
This awe which guards our earth-sprung, lineal kings?
What permanence, what stability like ours,
Whether blood flows or no, can yet invest
The broken order of your Dorian thrones,
Fix'd yesterday, and ten times changed since then?—
Two brothers, and their orphan nephews, strove
For the three conquer'd kingdoms of this isle;
The eldest, mightiest brother, Temenus, took
Argos; a juggle to Cresphontes gave
Messenia; to those helpless Boys, the lot
Worst of the three, the stony Sparta, fell.
August, indeed, was the foundation here!
What follow'd?—His most trusted kinsman slew
Cresphontes in Messenia; Temenus
Perish'd in Argos by his jealous sons;
The Spartan Brothers with their guardian strive.
Can houses thus ill-seated, thus embroil'd,
Thus little founded in their subjects' love,
Practise the indulgent, bloodless policy
Of dynasties long-fix'd, and honour'd long?
No! Vigour and severity must chain
Popular reverence to these recent lines.
Be their first-founded order strict maintain'd—
Their murder'd rulers terribly avenged—
Ruthlessly their rebellious subjects crush'd!
Since policy bids thus, what fouler death
Than thine illustrious husband's to avenge
Shall we select? than Polyphontes, what

More daring and more grand offender find?
Justice, my sister, long demands this blow,
And Wisdom, now thou see'st, demands it too.
To strike it, then, dissuade thy son no more;
For to live disobedient to these two,
Justice and Wisdom, is no life at all.

Chor. The Gods, O mistress dear! the hard-soul'd man,
Who spared not others, bid not us to spare.

Mer. Alas! against my brother, son, and friends,
One, and a woman, how can I prevail?—
O brother, thou hast conquer'd; yet, I fear!
Son! with a doubting heart thy mother yields;
May it turn happier than my doubts portend!

Lai. Meantime on thee the task of silence only
Shall be imposed; to us shall be the deed.
Now, not another word, but to our act!
Nephew! thy friends are sounded, and prove true.
Thy father's murderer, in the public place,
Performs, this noon, a solemn sacrifice;
Be with him—choose the moment—strike thy blow!
If prudence counsels thee to go unarm'd,
The sacrificer's axe will serve thy turn.
To me and the Messenians leave the rest,
With the Gods' aid—and, if they give but aid
As our just cause deserves, I do not fear.

[Aepytus, Laias, *and* Arcas *go out.*

Chor. O Son and Mother, *str.* 1.
Whom the Gods o'ershadow
In dangerous trial,
With certainty of favour!
As erst they shadow'd
Your race's founders
From irretrievable woe;
When the seed of Lycaon

Lay forlorn, lay outcast,
Callisto and her Boy.

What deep-grass'd meadow *ant.* 1.
At the meeting valleys—
Where clear-flowing Ladon,
Most beautiful of waters,
Receives the river
Whose trout are vocal,
The Aroanian stream—
Without home, without mother,
Hid the babe, hid Arcas,
The nursling of the dells?

But the sweet-smelling myrtle, *str.* 2.
And the pink-flower'd oleander,
And the green agnus-castus,
To the west-wind's murmur,
Rustled round his cradle;
And Maia rear'd him.
Then, a boy, he startled,
In the snow-fill'd hollows
Of high Cyllenê,
The white mountain-birds;
Or surprised, in the glens,
The basking tortoises,
Whose striped shell founded
In the hand of Hermes
The glory of the lyre.

But his mother, Callisto, *ant.* 2.
In her hiding-place of the thickets
Of the lentisk and ilex
In her rough form, fearing
The hunter on the outlook,
Poor changeling! trembled.

Or the children, plucking
In the thorn-choked gullies
Wild gooseberries, scared her,
The shy mountain-bear!
Of the shepherds, on slopes
With pale-spiked lavender
And crisp thyme tufted,
Came upon her, stealing
At daybreak through the dew.

Once, 'mid those gorges, *str.* 3
Spray-drizzled, lonely,
Unclimb'd of man—
O'er whose cliffs the townsmen
Of crag-perch'd Nonacris
Behold in summer
The slender torrent
Of Styx come dancing,
A wind-blown thread—
By the precipices of Khelmos,
The fleet, desperate hunter,
The youthful Arcas, born of Zeus,
His fleeing mother,
Transform'd Callisto,
Unwitting follow'd—
And raised his spear.

Turning, with piteous, *ant.* 3.
Distressful longing,
Sad, eager eyes,
Mutely she regarded
Her well-known enemy.
Low moans half utter'd
What speech refused her;
Tears coursed, tears human,

Down those disfigured,
Once human cheeks.
With unutterable foreboding
Her son, heart-stricken, eyed her.
The Gods had pity, made them Stars.
Stars now they sparkle
In the northern Heaven—
The guard Arcturus,
The guard-watch'd Bear.

So, o'er thee and thy child, *epode.*
Some God, Merope, now,
In dangerous hour, stretches his hand.
So, like a star, dawns thy son,
Radiant with fortune and joy.

[POLYPHONTES *comes in.*

Pol. O Merope, the trouble on thy face
Tells me enough thou know'st the news which all
Messenia speaks! the prince, thy son, is dead.
Not from my lips should consolation fall;
To offer that, I come not; but to urge,
Even after news of this sad death, our league.
Yes, once again I come; I will not take
This morning's angry answer for thy last.
To the Messenian kingdom thou and I
Are the sole claimants left; what cause of strife
Lay in thy son is buried in his grave.
Most honourably I meant, I call the Gods
To witness, offering him return and power;
Yet, had he lived, suspicion, jealousy,
Inevitably had surged up, perhaps,
'Twixt thee and me—suspicion, that I nursed
Some ill design against him; jealousy,
That he enjoy'd but part, being heir to all.

And he himself, with the impetuous heart
Of youth, 'tis like, had never quite forgone
The thought of vengeance on me, never quite
Unclosed his itching fingers from his sword.
But thou, O Merope, though deeply wrong'd,
Though injured past forgiveness, as men deem,
Yet hast been long at school with thoughtful time,
And from that teacher mayst have learn'd, like me,
That all may be endured, and all forgiv'n—
Have learn'd, that we must sacrifice the bent
Of personal feeling to the public weal—
Have learn d, that there are guilty deeds, which leave
The hand that does them guiltless; in a word,
That kings live for their peoples, not themselves.
This having known, let us a union found
(For the last time I ask, ask earnestly)
Based on pure public welfare; let us be
Not Merope and Polyphontes, foes
Blood-sever'd, but Messenia's King and Queen!
Let us forget ourselves for those we rule!
Speak! I go hence to offer sacrifice
To the Preserver Zeus; let me return
Thanks to him for our amity as well.

Mer. Oh, hadst thou, Polyphontes, still but kept
The silence thou hast kept for twenty years!

Pol. Henceforth, if what I urge displease, I may.
But fair proposal merits fair reply.

Mer. And thou shalt have it! Yes, because thou *hast*
For twenty years forborne to interrupt
The solitude of her whom thou hast wrong'd—
That scanty grace shall earn thee this reply.—
First, for our union. Trust me, 'twixt us two
The brazen-footed Fury ever stalks,
Waving her hundred hands, a torch in each,

Aglow with angry fire, to keep us twain.
Now, for thyself. Thou com'st with well-cloak'd joy,
To announce the ruin of my husband's house,
To sound thy triumph in his widow's ears,
To bid her share thine unendanger'd throne.
To this thou wouldst have answer. Take it: Fly! . . .
Cut short thy triumph, seeming at its height;
Fling off thy crown, supposed at last secure;
Forsake this ample, proud Messenian realm;
To some small, humble, and unnoted strand,
Some rock more lonely than that Lemnian isle
Where Philoctetes pined, take ship and flee!
Some solitude more inaccessible
Than the ice-bastion'd Caucasian Mount
Chosen a prison for Prometheus, climb!
There in unvoiced oblivion sink thy name,
And bid the sun, thine only visitant,
Divulge not to the far-off world of men
What once-famed wretch he there did espy hid.
There nurse a late remorse, and thank the Gods,
And thank thy bitterest foe, that, having lost
All things but life, thou lose not life as well.

Pol. What mad bewilderment of grief is this?

Mer. *Thou* art bewilder'd; the sane head is mine.

Pol. I pity thee, and wish thee calmer mind.

Mer. Pity thyself; none needs compassion more.

Pol. Yet, oh! couldst thou but act as reason bids!

Mer. And in my turn I wish the same for thee.

Pol. All I could do to soothe thee has been tried.

Mer. For that, in this my warning, thou art paid.

Pol. Know'st thou then aught, that thus thou sound'st the alarm?

Mer. Thy crime! that were enough to make one fear.

Pol. My deed is of old date, and long atoned.

Mer. Atoned this very day, perhaps, it is.
Pol. My final victory proves the Gods appeased.
Mer. O victor, victor, trip not at the goal!
Pol. Hatred and passionate envy blind thine eyes.
Mer. O Heaven-abandon'd wretch, that envies thee!
Pol. Thou hold'st so cheap, then, the Messenian crown?
Mer. I think on what the future hath in store.
Pol. To-day I reign; the rest I leave to Fate.
Mer. For Fate thou wait'st not long; since, in this hour——
Pol. What? for so far Fate hath not proved my foe—
Mer. Fate seals my lips, and drags to ruin thee.
Pol. Enough! enough! I will no longer hear
The ill-boding note which frantic hatred sounds
To affright a fortune which the Gods secure.
Once more my friendship thou rejectest; well!
More for this land's sake grieve I, than mine own.
I chafe not with thee, that thy hate endures,
Nor bend myself too low, to make it yield.
What I have done is done; by my own deed,
Neither exulting nor ashamed, I stand.
Why should this heart of mine set mighty store
By the construction and report of men?
Not men's good word hath made me what I am.
Alone I master'd power; and alone,
Since so thou wilt, I dare maintain it still.

[POLYPHONTES *goes out.*

Chor. Did I then waver *str.* 1.
(O woman's judgement!)
Misled by seeming
Success of crime?
And ask, if sometimes
The Gods, perhaps, allow'd you,
O lawless daring of the strong,
O self-will recklessly indulged?

Not time, not lightning, *ant.* 1.
Not rain, not thunder,
Efface the endless
Decrees of Heaven—
Make Justice alter,
Revoke, assuage her sentence,
Which dooms dread ends to dreadful deeds,
And violent deaths to violent men.

But the signal example *str.* 2.
Of invariableness of justice 1811
Our glorious founder
Heracles gave us,
Son loved of Zeus his father—for he sinn'd.

And the strand of Euboea, *ant.* 2.
And the promontory of Cenaeum,
His painful, solemn
Punishment witness'd,
Beheld his expiation—for he died.

O villages of Oeta *str.* 3.
With hedges of the wild rose! 1821
O pastures of the mountain,
Of short grass, beaded with dew,
Between the pine-woods and the cliffs!
O cliffs, left by the eagles,
On that morn, when the smoke-cloud
From the oak-built, fiercely-burning pyre,
Up the precipices of Trachis,
Drove them screaming from their eyries!
A willing, a willing sacrifice on that day 1830
Ye witness'd, ye mountain lawns,
When the shirt-wrapt, poison-blister'd Hero
Ascended, with undaunted heart,
Living, his own funeral-pile,

And stood, shouting for a fiery torch;
And the kind, chance-arrived Wanderer,
The inheritor of the bow,
Coming swiftly through the sad Trachinians,
Put the torch to the pile.
That the flame tower'd on high to the Heaven;
Bearing with it, to Olympus,
To the side of Hebe,
To immortal delight,
The labour-released Hero.

O heritage of Neleus, *ant.* 3.
Ill-kept by his infirm heirs!
O kingdom of Messenê,
Of rich soil, chosen by craft,
Possess'd in hatred, lost in blood!
O town, high Stenyclaros,
With new walls, which the victors
From the four-town'd, mountain-shadow'd Doris,
For their Heracles-issued princes
Built in strength against the vanquish'd!
Another, another sacrifice on this day
Ye witness, ye new-built towers!
When the white-robed, garland-crowned Monarch
Approaches, with undoubting heart,
Living, his own sacrifice-block,
And stands, shouting for a slaughterous axe;
And the stern, destiny-brought Stranger,
The inheritor of the realm,
Coming swiftly through the jocund Dorians,
Drives the axe to its goal.
That the blood rushes in streams to the dust;
Bearing with it, to Erinnys,
To the Gods of Hades,

To the dead unavenged,
The fiercely-required Victim.

Knowing he did it, unknowing pays for it. *epode.*
Unknowing, unknowing,
Thinking atoned-for
Deeds unatonable,
Thinking appeased
Gods unappeasable,
Lo, the ill-fated one,
Standing for harbour
Right at the harbour-mouth
Strikes with all sail set
Full on the sharp-pointed
Needle of ruin!

[*A* Messenger *comes in.*

Mess. O honour'd Queen, O faithful followers
Of your dead master's line, I bring you news
To make the gates of this long-mournful house
Leap, and fly open of themselves for joy!

[*Noise and shouting heard.*

Hark how the shouting crowds tramp hitherward
With glad acclaim! Ere they forestall my news,
Accept it:—Polyphontes is no more.

Mer. Is my son safe? that question bounds my care.

Mess. He is, and by the people hail'd for king.

Mer. The rest to me is little; yet, since that
Must from some mouth be heard, relate it thou.

Mess. Not little, if thou saw'st what love, what zeal,
At thy dead husband's name the people show.
For when this morning in the public square
I took my stand, and saw the unarm'd crowds
Of citizens in holiday attire,
Women and children intermix'd; and then,

Group'd around Zeus's altar, all in arms,
Serried and grim, the ring of Dorian lords—
I trembled for our prince and his attempt.
Silence and expectation held us all;
Till presently the King came forth, in robe
Of sacrifice, his guards clearing the way
Before him—at his side, the prince, thy son,
Unarm'd and travel-soil'd, just as he was.
With him conferring the King slowly reach'd
The altar in the middle of the square,
Where, by the sacrificing minister,
The flower-dress'd victim stood—a milk-white bull,
Swaying from side to side his massy head
With short impatient lowings. There he stopp'd,
And seem'd to muse awhile, then raised his eyes
To heaven, and laid his hand upon the steer,
And cried: *O Zeus, let what blood-guiltiness*
Yet stains our land be by this blood wash'd out,
And grant henceforth to the Messenians peace!
That moment, while with upturn'd eyes he pray'd,
The prince snatch'd from the sacrificer's hand
The axe, and on the forehead of the King,
Where twines the chaplet, dealt a mighty blow
Which fell'd him to the earth, and o'er him stood,
And shouted: *Since by thee defilement came,*
What blood so meet as thine to wash it out?
What hand to strike thee meet as mine, the hand
Of Aepytus, thy murder'd master's son?—
But, gazing at him from the ground, the King . . .
Is it, then, thou? he murmur'd; and with that,
He bow'd his head, and deeply groan'd, and died.
Till then we all seem'd stone, but then a cry
Broke from the Dorian lords; forward they rush'd
To circle the prince round—when suddenly

Laias n arms sprang to his nephew's side,
Crying: *O ye Messenians, will ye leave*
The son to perish as ye left the sire?
And from that moment I saw nothing clear;
For from all sides a deluge, as it seem'd,
Burst o'er the altar and the Dorian lords,
Of holiday-clad citizens transform'd
To armed warriors;—I heard vengeful cries,
I heard the clash of weapons; then I saw
The Dorians lying dead, thy son hail'd king.
And, truly, one who sees, what seem'd so strong,
The power of this tyrant and his lords,
Melt like a passing smoke, a nightly dream,
At one bold word, one enterprising blow—
Might ask, why we endured their yoke so long;
But that we know how every perilous feat
Of daring, easy as it seems when done,
Is easy at no moment but the right.

Chor. Thou speakest well; but here, to give our eyes
Authentic proof of what thou tell'st our ears,
The conquerors, with the King's dead body, come.

[Aepytus, Laias, *and* Arcas *come in with the dead body of* Polyphontes, *followed by a crowd of the* Messenians.

Lai. Sister, from this day forth thou art no more
The widow of a husband unavenged,
The anxious mother of an exiled son.
Thine enemy is slain, thy son is king!
Rejoice with us! and trust me, he who wish'd
Welfare to the Messenian state, and calm,
Could find no way to found them sure as this.

Aep. Mother, all these approve me; but if thou
Approve not too, I have but half my joy.

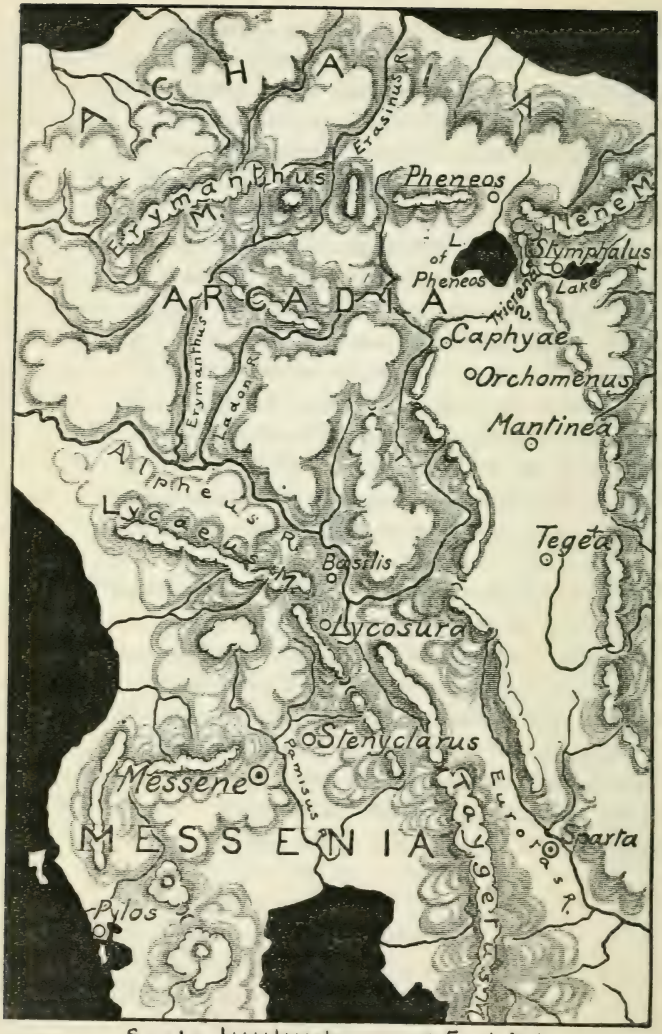
Mer. O Aepytus, my son, behold, behold

This iron man, my enemy and thine,
This politic sovereign, lying at our feet,
With blood-bespatter'd robes, and chaplet shorn!
Inscrutable as ever, see, it keeps
Its sombre aspect of majestic care,
Of solitary thought, unshared resolve,
Even in death, that countenance austere!
So look'd he, when to Stenyclaros first,
A new-made wife, I from Arcadia came,
And found him at my husband's side, his friend,
His kinsman, his right hand in peace and war,
Unsparing in his service of his toil,
His blood—to me, for I confess it, kind;
So look'd he in that dreadful day of death;
So, when he pleaded for our league but now.
What meantest thou, O Polyphontes, what
Desired'st thou, what truly spurr'd thee on?
Was policy of state, the ascendency
Of the Heracleidan conquerors, as thou said'st,
Indeed thy lifelong passion and sole aim?
Or didst thou but, as cautious schemers use,
Cloak thine ambition with these specious words?
I know not; just, in either case, the stroke
Which laid thee low, for blood requires blood;
But yet, not knowing this, I triumph not
Over thy corpse—triumph not, neither mourn,—
For I find worth in thee, and badness too.
What mood of spirit, therefore, shall we call
The true one of a man—what way of life
His fix'd condition and perpetual walk?
None, since a twofold colour reigns in all.
But thou, my son, study to make prevail
One colour in thy life, the hue of truth;
That justice, that sage order, not alone

Natural vengeance, may maintain thine act,
And make it stand indeed the will of Heaven.
Thy father's passion was this people's ease,
This people's anarchy thy foe's pretence.
As the chiefs rule, my son, the people are.
Unhappy people, where the chiefs themselves
Are, like the mob, vicious and ignorant!
So rule, that even thine enemies may fail
To find in thee a fault whereon to found,
Of tyrannous harshness, or remissness weak—
So rule, that as thy father thou be loved!
So rule, that as his foe thou be obey'd!
Take these, my son, over thine enemy's corpse
Thy mother's prayers! and this prayer last of all:
That even in thy victory thou show,
Mortal, the moderation of a man.

Aep. O mother, my best diligence shall be
In all by thy experience to be ruled
Where my own youth falls short! But, Laias, now,
First work after such victory, let us go
To render to my true Messenians thanks,
To the Gods grateful sacrifice; and then,
Assume the ensigns of my father's power.

Chor. Son of Cresphontes, past what perils
Com'st thou, guided safe, to thy home!
What things daring! what enduring!
And all this by the will of the Gods.


ACHAIA
Erasinus R.
Pheneos
Erymanthus M.
Nemea
L. of Pheneos
Stymphalus
Lake
ARCADIA
Aroania M.
Caphyae
Erymanthus
Ladon R.
Orchomenus
Mantinea
Alpheus R.
Lycaeus M.
Tegea
Basilis
Lycosura
Stenyclarus
Messene
Pamisus R.
Taygetus M.
Eurotas R.
Sparta
MESSENIA
Pylos
Scale 10 5 0 10 Engl. Miles

NOTES

1. The opening scene is closely modelled on that of the *Electra*, where, in the dramatic position, Orestes corresponds to Aepytus and the Paedagogus to Laias.

5. *Wealthy in corn*, &c. The fertility of Messenia was proverbial.

6. *The late-relenting Gods.* Since the death of Hercules his sons and descendants had repeatedly attempted to possess themselves of the Peloponnese, but had always been unsuccessful. At last, in the hundredth year after the death of Hyllus (Hercules' son, and one of the progenitors of the Heracleidae), the sons of Aristomachus, the grandson of Hyllus, namely Cresphontes, Temenus, and Aristodemus, succeeded in conquering it. In the division of the country Messenia fell to the lot of Cresphontes.

10. *Stenyclaros.* Στενύκλαρος, or Στενύκρηρος, was the city founded by Cresphontes just after he obtained Messenia, and became the capital of that province.

12. *Degrading Pylos.* Before Cresphontes built Stenyclaros the seat of government had been at Pylos.

16. *Southward and west. First ed.* reads 'Thence to the South', the substitution being topographically more correct.

17. *Taygetus.* The loftiest mountain in the Peloponnese, extending seventy miles, dividing Messenia and Laconia, and terminating in the promontory of Taenarum, now Cape Matapan.

19. *Pamisus.* The largest river in Messenia: it rises near the village of Sulima and flows along the western side of the plain, being composed of the two streams, the Electra and the Cocus.

20. *Lycaeus.* One of the loftiest mountains in Arcadia, the modern Dioforti in the Parrhasian district.

22. *Snatch'd from the slaughter.* See General Introduction, p. 19.

29 seqq. For all this see General Introduction, p. 19.

51 seqq. *Softly, stand back ... tomb.* This scene is imitated from *Choephori* 20 seqq., where the dramatic position is exactly similar. *First ed.* 'tow'rd the' for 'to these'.

54. *With pitchers ... fresh-pull'd flowers.* See note on l. 595.

56. *look. First ed.* 'see'.

grief-plunged. In earlier English 'p'unge' was commonly used of trouble or distress; cf. Addison's *Cato*, iii. 11 'to raise me from amidst this *plunge* of sorrows'; whether a verb formed from it was used I do not know, but 'grief-plunged' seems to mean grief distressed; possibly it merely means plunged in grief, as Arnold is very loose in this compound, cf. 'murder-sav'd', *infra* l. 1102.

64. *approaching. First ed.* 'issuing'.

71. *locks from thy head.* This was a customary offering. There was something peculiarly appropriate in the offering of a lock of hair, because though separable from the body it was yet a part of it, and so came to represent the very person of the dedicator. As an offering to the dead, both as a token of grief and of respect and reverence, it was specially suitable. Thus we find it offered by Orestes in the *Choephori* l. 6 and cf. l. 168. So Electra tells Chrysothemis to lay a lock of her own and Electra's hair on Agamemnon's tomb, *Electra* 448-9; cf. too Homer, *Iliad* xxiii. 141-51. See an interesting note on this question in Plumptre's *Translation of Aeschylus*, vol. i, p. 98.

112. *Tow'rd thee: toward thy. First ed.* 'tow'rds', 'toward'.

122. Polyphontes was a Heraclid.

123. *grown. First ed.* 'sprung'.

134. *Since that. First ed.* 'Since then'.

139. *dead husband's faction.* Cresphontes favoured the native Messenians, greatly to the dissatisfaction of the Dorians, by whose assistance he had succeeded with his brother in conquering the Peloponnesus, and is said to have wished to confer on the Messenians equal privileges with the Dorians by portioning out Messenia into five states, and so, by scattering the Dorians over a wide area, enabling the Messenians to assert themselves. It was to oppose this policy that Polyphontes headed a cabal against him, and overthrew his rule by his murder.

152. *threshold.* A Homeric phrase.

187. *moves. First ed.* 'draws'.

206. *Against a power. First ed.* 'Power'.

212. *the eagle. First ed.* 'Eagle'; so in next line but one 'Eaglets'.

213-14. *left His puny, callow eaglets.* A reference to the well-known death of Hercules on Mount Oeta, and the sufferings and misfortunes of the Heracleidae.

216-17. For these two lines the *First ed.* reads

used
Two generations of his offspring up;

the correction not only rectifying an extraordinary lapse in style, but an historical, or rather mythical error, for three generations had been worn out in these unsuccessful attempts.

224. *Aegimius gave.* After the death of Hyllus, who was defeated by the Achaians and Arcadians at the Isthmus of Corinth and there killed by Echemus, king of Tegea, the Heracleidae could find no shelter till they were received by Aegimius, king of the Dorians; by whose assistance, after being thrice repelled, they finally succeeded in establishing themselves in the Peloponnesus.

231. *his brother.* Temenus, who in the distribution of the Peloponnese took Argos.

232. *nephews.* Procles and Eurysthenes, the two sons of Aristodemus the brother of Cresphontes, who jointly ruled Sparta.

236. *the Aeolian stock of Neleus.* Neleus was, according to some, a son of Poseidon; according to others a son of Cretheus, the son of Aeolus: he was the father of Nestor. Melanthus, a descendant of Neleus, was king of Messenia when Cresphontes and the Dorians conquered it.

241. *an Arcadian princess.* Merope was a daughter of Cypselus, king of Arcadia.

244. *their promotion.* See note on l. 139.

249. *five confederate states.* See note on l. 139.

266 seqq. Polyphontes certainly makes out a good case for himself: whether he was speaking the truth about what had actuated him in murdering Cresphontes Merope herself could not, when calmly deliberative, decide. See l. 1979 seqq.

284. *ask in Lacedaemon.* I restore the reading of the *first ed.*; the later editions, possibly through a misprint, read 'asked'. The reference is to the Conquest of the Peloponnesus by the Heracleidae, i.e. Aristomachus, Temenus, and Cresphontes, who defeated Tisamenus, the ruler of Argos and Lacedaemon. On his defeat many of his vanquished subjects sought shelter in Achaia.

307. *the over-tense.* Cf. *Antigone* 473–6 and 710–17.

341. *the heart argues.* For the idea that in women the emotions supply the place of the reason cf. Menander, *Sent. Sing.* 87, ed. Meineke

γυνὴ γὰρ οὐδὲν οἶδε πλὴν ὃ βούλεται

(for a woman knows nothing but what she desires to know).

342. *assoil'd.* To assoil, derived directly from the Old French *assoilier* (*que Dieu assoille*—whom God forgive)—and originally from the Latin *absolvere*, means to absolve from sin.

348. *One son.* Aepytus.

349. *Tyrants think,* &c. Adopted, as Arnold himself tells us, from Maffei's *Merope* (Act i. Sc. 1. 1089):

> Ecco il don di tyranni: a lor rassembla
> Morte non dando altrui, di dar la vita.

(Lo, the boon of tyrants: in not putting another to death it seems to them that they are giving him life.)

356. *help. First ed.* 'hope'.

385–547. The whole of this Kommos is modelled closely on that in the *Electra* between Electra and the Chorus (*Electra* 121–1250), but strophe and antistrophe do not always metrically correspond, corresponding only in their general rhythmic effect, which is the case with the Chorus all through this play, except in the last Chorus where strophe and antistrophe do exactly answer. It will be sufficient to give the scansion of the strophes, as they strike the note to be echoed.

Strophe I.

– – – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– – – ∪ ∪ –
∪ – – – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –

Strophe II.

– ∪ ∪ – – –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– – – ∪ ∪ –
– – – ∪ ∪ –
– – – ∪ ∪ –
∪ – – – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ – – ∪ ∪ –

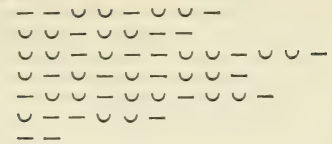
Strophe III.

– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ – – – ∪ ∪ –
∪ – – – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ – – ∪ ∪ ∪ –
– – – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ –

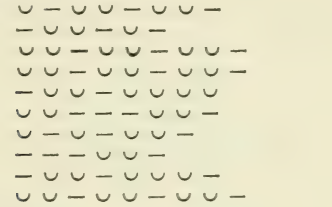
Strophe IV.

∪ – ∪ – ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ – –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ – –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – – – –
– ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ –
∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ – –
– – – ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ – – –

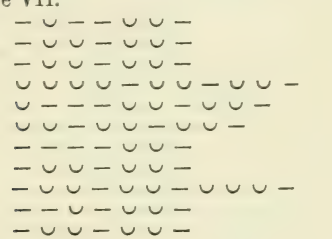
Strophe V.



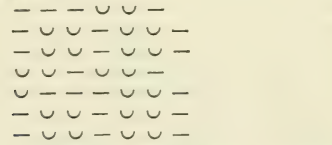
Strophe VI.



Strophe VII.



Strophe VIII.



With the Kommos in the *Electra* should be compared that in the *Choephori* 305–477, from which Arnold has largely borrowed.

386. *Lay honey-cakes.* See note on l. 605.

390. *Behold, O King.* *Choeph.* 333–4:

> Κλῦθί νυν, ὦ πάτερ, ἐν μέρει
> πολυδάκρυτα πένθη.

(Hear now, O father, in turn our tear-drenched woes.)

393. *Youth.* Aepytus.

412. *the third generation.* When the Heracleidae were preparing to effect their return to the Peloponnesus, after the defeat of Eurystheus at Marathon, Hyllus inquired of the oracle at Delphi respecting their return, and was told to return by the *narrow passage* and in the *third generation.* But misunderstanding the oracle, they were not successful till it was explained to them that by the 'third harvest' was meant the third generation, and by the 'narrow passage' was meant the Corinthian Gulf. Upon that the sons of Aristomachus, the third generation, built a fleet at Naupactus, and shortly afterwards conquered the Peloponnesus, Temenus taking Argos, Procles and Erysthenes, the sons of Aristodemus, getting Sparta, and Cresphontes Messenia.

425. *a Maid.* Macaria, a daughter of Hercules by Dejanira. Her story is thus told by Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, i. 32): 'In Marathon there is a spring called Macaria of which they tell the following tale. When Hercules fled from Tiryns to escape from Eurystheus he went to reside with his friend Ceyx, king of Trachis. But when Hercules had departed this life, and Eurystheus demanded that the hero's children should be given up, the king of Trachis sent them to Athens, pleading his own weakness and the power of Theseus to protect them. But when they were come as suppliants to Athens, they were the occasion of the first war that the Peloponnesians waged on the Athenians, for Theseus would not surrender them at the demand of Eurystheus. It is said that an oracle declared to the Athenians that one of the children of Hercules must die a voluntary death, since otherwise they could not be victorious. Then Macaria, daughter of Hercules and Dejanira, slew herself, and thereby gave to the Athenians victory and to the spring her name.' On this legend is founded the *Heracleidae* of Euripides, in which the two speeches of Macaria, 500-35 and 574-96, are two of the noblest and most pathetic passages in all dramatic poetry.

435-46. *plain of Tegea . . . chief of his house.* Echemus was king of Tegea in Arcadia, and Agamemnon's 'unhappy matricidal son', Orestes, is said to have died of a snake-bite at or near Tegea, where his tomb 'on the straight road that leads from Tegea to Thyrea', was still to be seen in the time of Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, viii. 54), but his bones were afterwards carried to Sparta and buried near the sanctuary of the Fates, where his grave was also to be seen (*Id.* iii. 11).

For the reference to the death of Hyllus, who was killed by Echemus, see note on l. 224.

444. *fate-denied straits.* The straits of the Corinthian Gulf, which he was prevented from passing by his defeat and death at the hands of Echemus.

447. *Brother follow'd sister.* Hyllus was the brother of Macaria.

449-51. *his seed... Tisamenus.* Temenus, Aristodemus, and Cresphontes defeated and killed Tisamenus the ruler of Argos and Lacedaemon, and possessed themselves of his kingdom.

457. *the third.* Aristodemus.

462-8. *Your sons . . . all-wept way.* A reference to the fate of Aristodemus, Cresphontes' brother. He was slain at Delphi by Procles and Eurysthenes the sons of Pylades and Electra, who were the cousins of Tisamenus, Tisamenus being the son of Orestes. Pausanias says, iii. 1: 'Those who wish to invest him with a halo of glory say that he was shot by Apollo for not consulting the oracle. . . . But the truer story is that he was murdered by the children of Pylades and Orestes.' In l. 462 the *first ed.* reads 'Ye lie waiting for', and in l. 467 'Grandson' for 'Thrice son'.

474. *minister loved.* The fact that Cresphontes loved Polyphontes aggravates the crime of the murder.

477. *Thou touchest.* An echo from the *Antigone* 857 ἔψαυσας ἀλγεινοτάτας ἐμοὶ μερίμνας (thou touchest my bitterest grief), and the grief was the same.

478. *Oh had he fallen.* Imitated from *Choeph.* 345 seqq.:

> εἰ γὰρ ὑπ' Ἰλίῳ
> πρός τινος Λυκίων, πάτερ,
> δορίτμητος κατηναρίσθης,
> λιπὼν ἂν εὔκλειαν ἐν δόμοισι
>
> . . . . . .
>
> πολύχωστον ἂν εἶχες
> τάφον διαποντίου γᾶς
> δώμασιν εὐφόρητον.

(Ah, would that thou hadst been slain, cut down by the spear of some Lycian under Ilion, thou wouldst have left a fair name on thy house, and thou wouldst have had a sepulchre of foreign land piled high, endurable, indeed, to thy house.)

492. *a Form.* Cf. with this powerful image *Electra* 198-200:

> δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἔρος ὁ κτείνας,
> δεινὰν δεινῶς προφυτεύσαντες
> μορφάν.

(Fraud was the plotter, lust the murderer, when in ghastly union *they had bodied forth a ghastly form.*)

505. *Not to thee.* A stock commonplace in Greek tragedy, as in life, but imitated directly from *Electra* 153-4:

> οὔτοι σοὶ μούνᾳ, τέκνον,
> ἄχος ἐφάνη βροτῶν.

(Not to thee, not to thee alone of mortals hath trouble appeared.) Cf. Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* iii. 3. 33 'Ne illa quidem consolatio firmis-

sima est, quanquam et usitata est et saepe prodest—non tibi hoc solum.' (Nor is even that consolation much to be relied on, though it is so often employed and is often of avail—not to thee alone has this happened.)

513. *for vengeance, a champion.* *First ed.* reads 'in safety, a nursling', and in the next line 'Yet, yet'.

517. *I await.* *First ed.* reads 'through the slow-dragging year'.

518. *Vainly,* &c. The text here has been completely changed from the *first ed.*, which reads:

> Longing, listening, I wait, I implore,
> But he comes not. What dell,
> O Erymanthus! from sight
> Of his mother, which of thy glades,
> O Lycaeus! conceals
> The happy hunter? He basks
> In youth's pure morning, nor thinks
> On the blood-stain'd home of his birth.

519. *Lycaeus.* See note on l. 20.

526-7. *But Zeus,* &c. Adopted from the *Electra* (173-5):

> θάρσει μοι, θάρσει, τέκνον.
> ἔτι μέγας οὐρανῷ
> Ζεύς, ὃς ἐφορᾷ πάντα καὶ κρατύνει.

(Courage, I pray thee, courage, child, Zeus is still great in heaven and he o'erlooks and sways all.)

531. *Sit, and eye,* &c. *First ed.* reads 'Sit, and make ready the serpent, the scourge'.

535-40. *Bring to . . . child!* *First ed.* reads and substitutes for present text:

> Bring to his mother, the rest I commit,
> Willing, patient to Zeus, to his care.
> Blood I ask not. Enough
> Sated, and more than enough
> Are mine eyes with blood. But if this,
> O my comforters! strays
> Amiss from Justice, the Gods
> Forgive my folly, and work
> What they will!—but to give me my son!

541. *Hear us,* &c. Imitated from *Choeph.* 332.

543. *Send an avenger.* *Choeph.* 455-9.

564. *Small comfort,* &c. *First ed.* 'There is small comfort for a woman here'.

567. *vengeance.* *First ed.* 'Vengeance'.

571-8. *Sun, . . . sire.* Adapted from the splendid passage in the speech of Ajax in the *Ajax* 845 seqq.:

> σὺ δ' ὦ τὸν αἰπὺν οὐρανὸν διφρηλατῶν
> Ἥλιε, πατρῴαν τὴν ἐμὴν ὅταν χθόνα
> ἴδῃς, ἐπισχὼν χρυσόνωτον ἡνίαν
> ἄγγειλον ἄτας τὰς ἐμὰς μόρον τ' ἐμὸν
> γέροντι πατρὶ τῇ τε δυστήνῳ τροφῷ.

(And thou, O Sun-god, who makest the lofty heavens thy chariot-course, draw in thy gold-studded rein when thou seest the land of my sires, and tell my calamities and my fate to my aged father, and to the unhappy woman who reared me.)

585. *May Hermes.* Hermes is invoked as the guardian and patron of the Dead in Hermes, as their escort to Hades, and their escort back to earth should they be permitted to revisit it, also as being the deliverer and champion of suppliants. Thus an invocation to Hermes opens the *Choephori*.

589-90. *wise and just,* &c. Another echo from the *Ajax* 550-1:

> ὦ παῖ, γένοιο πατρὸς εὐτυχέστερος,
> τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὅμοιος.

(O boy, mayest thou be more fortunate than thy sire, but in all other things alike.)

595. *these libations.* The libations consisted of milk, honey, water, and wine. See *Iphigenia in Tauris* 162-166:

> Πηγάς τ' οὐρείων ἐκ μόσχων
> Βάκχου τ' οἰνηρὰς λοιβὰς
> ξουθᾶν τε πόνημα μελισσᾶν,
> ἃ νεκροῖς θελκτήρια κεῖται.

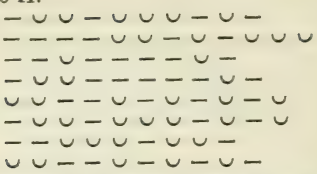
(Fountains gushing out of mountain kine, wine libations of Bacchus and the toil of tawny (*possibly* buzzing) bees are the things which are appointed to sooth the dead). See, too, Aeschylus, *Persae* 610-15; olives and fresh flowers, were sometimes added, *Id.* 615-18.

622-702. This stasimon is not a great success; it is harsh in its rhythm and very difficult, and, indeed, at times, impossible to reduce to correspondence in its strophe and antistrophe. Its scansion of the first strophe is or approximately is

(1) – – ∪ – ∪ –
(2) ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ –
(3) – ∪ ∪ – – – ∪ – ∪ –
(4) ∪ – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(5) ∪ ∪ – ∪ – ∪ –
– – ∪ ∪ ∪ – – –
(6) – – ∪ – ∪ –

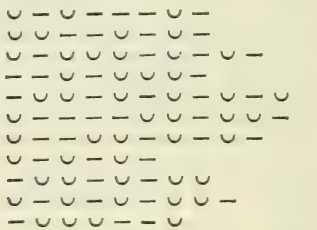
The antistrophe cannot be reduced to exact correspondence.

Strophe II.



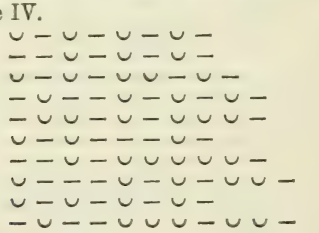
Again, the antistrophe is in very imperfect metrical accord only, generally corresponding in rhythmical impression.

Strophe III.

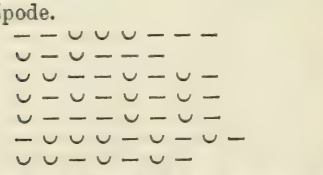


Antistrophe answering only in the general rhythmic impression, as also the antistrophe follows the next strophe.

Strophe IV.



Epode.



The connexion of the Chorus with the action of the drama has reference to the conduct of Polyphontes, the difficulty of under-

standing his motives in doing what he had done. Were they, as he had maintained, patriotic, or were they simply personal? In any case it is hard to justify violence and bloodshed, whatever be the motives for resorting to them. Zeus and Justice regard such deeds with abhorrence.

634. *wherewith.* *First ed.* 'with which'.

652. *The most are bad.* So said Bias—οἱ πλεῖστοι κακοί, Diogenes Laertius, i. 5, so says Theseus in Euripides:

ἔλεξε γάρ τις ὡς τὰ χείρονα
πλείω βροτοῖσίν ἐστι τῶν ἀμεινόνων.
Supplices 196–7.

('Tis said that the worse predominate over the better among mankind)—and so would say all who know men.

653. *the best rule.* Merely an annunciation of the principle of aristocracy, as understood by Plato.

662. *virtue.* In the *first ed.* 'Virtue', and so all through. 'Folly' in l. 668 has a capital, so also 'sea' (l. 622), 'earth' (l. 626), 'man' (l. 630).

708. *Might some one.* An imitation of the polite form of the Greek imperative.

713–14. An imitation of the brief way in which bad news is generally conveyed in Sophoclean drama. Cf. *Electra* 673 τέθνηκ' Ὀρέστης· ἐν βραχεῖ ξυνθεὶς λέγω. (Orestes is no more, I speak in brief.) Cf. the way in which the deaths of Jocasta (*Oedip. Rex* 1234–5), Oedipus (*Oedip. Col.* 579–80), Antigone and Haemon (*Antig.* 1173) are announced.

721. *That will I do.* An echo of *Electra* (678–9), where Clytemnestra, inquiring after the supposed death of Orestes, says:

ἐμοὶ δὲ σύ, ξένε,
τἀληθὲς εἰπέ, τῷ τρόπῳ διόλλυται;

(Come tell I pray the truth to me, stranger, in what way is he destroyed?), and the Paedagogus answers:

κἀπεμπόμην πρὸς ταῦτα καὶ τὸ πᾶν φράσω.

(As this was what I was sent for, so will I tell you all.)

The long fictitious narrative which follows is modelled on the similarly fictitious narrative of Orestes' imaginary death in the *Electra*. These vivid, detailed, and elaborate narratives form a distinct and peculiar feature in Greek tragedy, into which they are almost invariably introduced. In this narrative Arnold has drawn largely on the eighth book of Pausanias, not only for the topography and local colouring, but for the accident to which Aepytus' death is attributed. The journey of Aepytus from his leaving Tegea to his arrival at the Stymphalian lake can be followed closely in Pausanias. For some of the features of the country Arnold was probably indebted to Leake, *Travels in Morea*, vol. ii, ch. xvii.

735. *woods of oaks.* 'After the sanctuary of Poseidon you will pass into a place called Pelagus, which is full of oaks, and the road from Mantinea to Tegea leads through the oak-wood', Pausanias, viii. 11.

735-8. *Past Arnê spring . . . lambs.* Taken from Pausanias (*Description of Greece*), viii. 8 : 'Passing over a slight eminence you will descend into another plain, where there is a fountain called Arnê ("lamb") beside the high road'. The Arcadians tell the following story: 'When Rhea had brought forth Poseidon, she put him down in the midst of a flock, there to live with the lambs, and the spring got its name because the lambs browsed round it.'

739. *To Mantineia,* &c. The city of Mantinea, says Pausanias (*Id.*), is just about twelve furlongs from the spring of Arnê. The walls of Mantinea, he goes on to say, are built of unburnt bricks, the reason being that bricks afford greater security than stone walls against the shock of sieges.

740. *Sea-God's Sanctuary and the tomb.* 'At the skirts of the mountain is the Sanctuary of Horse Poseidon not more than ⟨six⟩ furlongs from Mantinea.' Pausanias (*Id.*) says that the Sanctuary in his time had been built by the Emperor Hadrian, and that the old one, no doubt a most conspicuous feature in the place, he can only describe from hearsay. Arcas, the son of Zeus by Callisto, was the ancestor and eponymous hero of the Arcadians. The grave here referred to was beside the altar of Herre, Acas' bones having been fetched from Maenalus in consequence of an oracle received from Delphi, which oracle Pausanias gives (viii. 9).

743-4. *Orchomenian plain . . . Stone Coffins.* The plain of Orchomenus is described as very marshy by Pausanias: 'The rain-water flowing through a deep gully between the city and Mount Trachy, falls into another plain in the territory of Orchomenus. This plain is spacious, but most of it is mere' (viii. 13). By the Stone Coffins Arnold appears to mean the Cairns close to the city of Orchomenus, which, standing at intervals, were heaped over men who fell in war, but in what wars, Pausanias says, is not known, as the tradition has been obliterated.

744-5. *Caphyae Cliffs, To Pheneos.* Aepytus' supposed journey leads him from the plain of Orchomenus to the cliffs of Caphya and to Pheneus. The description given by Pausanias is very exact. 'As you go from Orchomenus the road divides after about three furlongs, the straight road leads to the city of Caphya, running by the edge of the gully and afterwards skirting the water of the mere on the left. . . . On the road to Pheneus you will come to a mountain where the boundaries of Orchomenus, Pheneus, and Caphya meet. Above the spot where the boundaries meet rises a lofty crag, they name it the Caphyatic rock. After you have passed the boundaries of the said cañons there is a ravine

below, and the road to Pheneus runs through it.' Pausanias, viii. 13. So the city of Pheneus was reached, 'the acropolis being,' says Pausanias, 'precipitous on all sides.' Here as elsewhere I avail myself of Mr. Fraser's version.

748. *Three Fountains . . . Adder's Hill.* 'To the east of Pheneus there is a mountain top called Geronteum, and by it there is a road. . . . Keeping to the left of Mount Geronteum and journeying through the Pheneatian territory, you see still in Pheneatian territory the mountains called Trecrena (Three Fountains). . . . Not far from Mount Trecrena is another mountain called Sepia. Here Aepytus, son of Elatus, is said to have been killed by the snake, and here they made his grave, for they could carry the corpse no farther.' This Sepia Arnold calls the 'Adder's Hill'.

749–50. *Stymphalian Lake . . . Cyllenē's side.* At Stymphalus, in the north-east of Arcadia, in which name were included a district and a town, was a river taking its name from the place which went down into a chasm in the ground, and was the scene of the accident which follows. Mount Cyllene, the birthplace of Hermes, is, according to Pausanias, the highest mountain in Arcadia.

751. *There, on a high green . . . point. First ed.* reads 'There, on a grassy spur which bathes its root'. The liquid lake was the lake at the foot of the mountain (Apelaurum) at the southern end of the plain opposite Cyllēne, the Stymphalian lake (ἡ Στυμφαλὶς λίμνη); see Strabo, viii. 6, and Herodotus, vi.

776–7. *his ancestor*, &c. The story is told by Pausanias, viii. 5. This Aepytus was the son of Hippothus, king of Trapezus, and 'having dared to enter the sanctuary of Poseidon at Mantineia, entrance to which was then and is still forbidden, Aepytus was struck blind and died not long afterwards'.

780. *Another ancestor.* See note on l. 748.

794. *that. First ed.* 'which'.

797. *I watch'd. First ed.* 'I saw'.

811. *a chasm.* See note on ll. 749–50.

822–34. This incident and description, as Arnold said, were founded on the account which Pausanias (viii. 22) gives of an accident which happened to a huntsman in the same place. 'They used to celebrate the festival of Stymphalian Artemis at Stymphalus, carelessly omitting some of the established customs connected with it. Well, some timber drifting into the mouth of the chasm down which the river goes, dammed up the water, and the plain they say was turned into a lake for a space of four hundred furlongs. It is said that a deer pursued by a huntsman plunged into the marsh, and that the huntsman in the heat of the chase swam after it, and so both deer and man were engulfed in the chasm.'

846–9. *Basilis.* Basilis, described as being about ten furlongs from Bathos in Arcadia (Pausanias, viii), was founded by Cypselus. Lycaon was the son of Pelasgus who built Lycosura on Mount

Lycaeus. It was he who gave to Zeus the title of 'Lycaean' and who founded the Lycaean Games.

857. *So dies.* Cf. *Antigone* 598-99:

> νῦν γὰρ ἐσχάτας ὑπὲρ
> ῥίζας ὁ τέτατο φάος ἐν Οἰδίπου δόμοις.

(For now the light which had been stretched over the last root in the house of Oedipus.)

858. *this news. First ed.* 'the news'.

881. *Of peace,* &c. *First ed.* 'Of concord, and been baffled with disdain'.

890-913. This stasimon resembles the stasima—bright and joyful—which are so often ironically introduced by Sophocles just before calamity and ruin is about to befall, see *Ajax* 692-717; *Oedipus Rex* 1086-1109; *Trachiniae* 205-24. But here, though 'peace' is not to come in the sense in which Polyphontes wishes, still in another way its advent is approaching. The rhythm is admirably adapted to the theme, anapaests prevailing. It was suggested by, and borrowed largely from, the fragment of a Chorus in Euripides' play on the subject of the Merope legend, the *Cresphontes* (Nauck, *Trag. Graec. Frag.* p. 398):

> Εἰρήνα βαθύπλουτε καὶ
> καλλίστα μακάρων θεῶν,
> ζῆλός μοι σέθεν, ὡς χρονίζεις.
> δέδοικα δὲ μὴ πρὶν πόνοις
> ὑπερβάλῃ με γῆρας
> πρὶν σὰν χαρίεσσαν ὥραν προσιδεῖν
> καὶ καλλιχόρους ἀοιδὰς
> φιλοστεφάνους τε κώμους.
> ἴθι μοι, πότνα, πόλιν
> τὰν δ' ἐχθρὰν στάσιν εἶργ' ἀπ' οἴ-
> κων τὰν μαινομέναν τ' ἔριν
> θηκτῷ τερπομέναν σιδάρῳ.

(O Peace, exceeding rich, and fairest of the blessed Gods—longing I have for thee—how slow thou art in coming! I fear that with woes old age will overpower me before I behold thy gracious hour, and strains for beautiful dances, and garlanded revels. O come, our Queen, I pray thee, come to our city, and keep the discord we hate from our homes, and the strife that delights in the whetted sword!)

891. *delight. First ed.* 'Delight', and certainly this should be read as it is plainly personified.

902. *condemn'd. First ed.* 'decried'.

912. *Thracian Sea.* Cf. *Antigone* 586-91; and for the aspiration, Horace, *Odes*, Lib. i. 26. 1-4.

935. *tow'rd. First ed.* 'tow'rds'.

943. *Wherewith from,* &c. This line is not in *first ed.*

954. *falsehood. First ed.* 'Falsehood'.

962. *treason. First ed.* 'Treason': so in next line 'Loyalty'.

976. *Our prince,* &c. *First ed.* 'The prince, his uncle Laias'.

978-83. *'Tis so, 'tis so . . . here.* These lines are not in the *first ed.*

981. *Messenian king.* Polyphontes.

985-8. *The youth, . . . explain.* For these lines the *first ed.* reads:

Chor. And this perfidious murder who reveal'd?
Arc. The faithless murderer's own, no other tongue.
Chor. Did conscience goad him to denounce himself?
Arc. To Cypselus at Basilis he brought
This strange unlikely tale, the prince was drown'd.
Chor. But not a word appears of murder here.
Arc. Examin'd close, he own'd this story false.
Then evidence came—his comrades of the hunt,
Who saw the prince and Laias last with him,
Never again in life—next, agents fee'd
To ply 'twixt the Messenian king and him,
Spoke, and reveal'd that traffic, and the traitor.
So charg'd, he stood dumb-founder'd: Cypselus,
On this suspicion, cast him into chains.
Thence he escap'd—and next I find him here.
Chor. His presence with the King, thou mean'st, implies—
Arc. He comes to tell his prompter he hath sped.
Chor. Still he repeats the drowning story here.
Arc. To thee—that needs no Œdipus to explain.

988. *no Oedipus.* The best commentary on this will be two lines in Plautus (*Poenulus,* i. 3. 34-5):

> Nam isti quidem hercle orationi Oedipo
> Opust coniectore qui Sphingi interpres fuit.

(For that speech, by Hercules, needs an Oedipus, who interpreted the Sphinx, to make out.) So the saying of Davus in Terence, 'Davus sum, non Oedipus,' *Andria,* i. 2.

997-9. *Yes! yes!* &c. *First ed.* reads for these lines:

> He who was sent hath sped, and now comes back,
> To chuckle with his sender o'er the game
> Which foolish innocence plays with subtle guilt.

While for the line 'Yes! yes! now I conceive the liberal grace', is substituted 'Ah! now I comprehend the liberal grace.'

1016. *How must men.* Not in *first ed.*

1034. *Amphiaraos.* Son of Oicles and Hypermnestra, he was one of the seven chiefs who besieged Thebes, and is distinguished by Aeschylus as the one righteous man among them (see *Sept. cont.*

Theb. 590–96). When Adrastus and Amphiaraus were the only chiefs who survived, Amphiaraus, being pursued by Periclymenus, made his way to the river Ismenus before his enemy could overtake him. Zeus saved him by causing the earth to open and swallow up him and his chariot, making him immortal.

1042. *reproachfully wilt say.* For this idea of being reproached by the Dead, when the living join them after death, should their duty to them have been neglected, cf. *Antigone* 73–6.

1056. *Come, ye swift Furies.* This invocation recalls the prayer of Ajax to the same Powers, *Ajax* 831–44, though perhaps it may owe some of its inspiration to Lady Macbeth's speech.

1064–5. *black Tartarean cliff . . . Styx.* Pausanias (viii. 18) describes the water of the Styx as being close to the high cliff near the ruins of Nonacris. 'I know. he says, no cliff that rises to such a height. Water trickles down it, and the Greeks call it the waters of the Styx'; its water he describes as deadly to man and every living thing. And so it was fabled to be one of the rivers of Hell or Tartarus, the oath by which was the most awful that could be taken.

1077–8. *the King holds council,* &c. For these lines *first ed.* reads:

> I go!: I go!—yet, Queen, take this one word:
> Attempting deeds beyond thy power to do.

1093. *there is grief.* A peculiarly Greek sentiment, from the myriad illustrations which might be given of it cf. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1330–3:

> ἦ πολύμοχθον ἄρ' ἦν γένος
> ἢ πολύμοχθον ἀμερίων,
> χρεὼν δέ τι δύσποτμον ἀνδράσιν ἀνευρεῖν

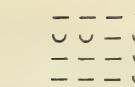
(Ever full of woes was the race, yea, ever full of woes the race, or of the children of a day—and in men one must needs find what is ill-starred), and Menander, *Frag. Incert. Fab.* cclxiii:

> ἄνθρωπος ἱκανὴ πρόφασις εἰς τὸ δυστυχές.

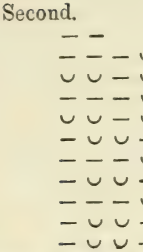
(Man is but pretext for calamity.)

1102–52. Another 'Kommos' closely on the model of those in the *Electra.* Its characteristic is the predominance of anapaests and dactyls. The scansion of the First Strophe is:

⏑ ⏑ – – – ⏑ ⏑ –
⏑ ⏑ – – – ⏑ ⏑ – –
⏑ – – – ⏑ ⏑ –
– ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –
– – – ⏑ ⏑ –
– – – ⏑ ⏑ –
– ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –



Of the Second.



1102. *murder-saved child.* An expression which nothing can justify, as bad as Cowper's 'church-going bell' in the verses on Alexander Selkirk.

1139-40. *clothed With.* Cf. *Choephori* 285 and 319-20.

1147-52. *Thrust back . . . door open.* Cf. the details in the *Choephori* 876-80.

1153-92. *He sleeps . . . Take——.* The fine irony of this scene will be apparent, and how pathetically true to nature it is! In a woman the softer emotions, if only accidentally awakened, instantly absorb and predominate over the sterner; and in addition to that we have that subtle 'aura', into the mysteries of which psychological science is beginning to penetrate.

1191-2. *A more just stroke,* &c. Adapted. as Arnold himself tells us, from one of the fragments of the *Cresphontes*: Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, p. 397:

> ὁσιωτέραν δὴ τήνδ' ἐγὼ δίδωμί σοι
> πλῆγήν.

(Holier (or juster) indeed is this blow which I am giving thee.)

Plutarch's commentary on the passage in which this line occurs, *On the eating of Flesh*, Orat. ii. ch. 5, is quoted by Arnold, 'Look at Merope in the tragedy lifting up the axe against her own son, as being the murderer of her own son, and crying—here he quotes the line—"What an agitation she makes in the theatre! how she fills the spectators with terror lest she should be too quick for the old man who is trying to stop her, and should strike the lad".'

1209. *In word I died.* Adopted from the *Electra* 59-60.

1251-5. *From the first-wrought . . . train.* So Aeschylus, *Agamem.* 758-60:

> τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον
> μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,
> σφετέρᾳ δ' εἰκότα γέννᾳ.

(A deed of impiety begetteth many others like unto their family.)

So too Shelley, *Hellas* 770–1:

> Revenge and wrong bring forth their kind,
> The foul cubs like their parents are.

1261. *Conferring.* *First ed.* 'concerting'.

1269. *Arcadian mate.* This was the Arcadian noble whom Polyphontes had in his pay to watch Aepytus (cf. 968 seqq.), but of whom Aepytus had made a friend; see what follows.

1273. *know not.* *First ed.* 'knew not'.

1317. *never-changing index.* 'Index' is here used in its proper sense, as the forefinger became used for pointing. *N. E. D.* quotes Mrs. Browning, *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*:

> And left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon the cheek.

Cf. for the image Shakespeare's

> Fixed figure for the hand of scorn
> To point his slow-unmoving finger at.
> *Othello*, iv. 2. 54–5.

1326. *give to*, &c. *First ed.* 'throw'.

1360. *Kindle their hearts.* *First ed.* 'Electrify' (a most unfortunately anachronistic expression, as Arnold probably saw) 'a mob' repeated.

1392. *intestine murder maims.* Temenus, the king of Argos, had been deposed by his sons who were jealous of Desphontes their brother-in-law, and Cisus his son succeeded him, but affairs at Argos were so unsettled that Pausanias tells us the son of Cisus, Medon, when he succeeded him, had nothing but the title of king left him. See Pausanias, ii. 19.

1393. *Procles and his brother.* See note on l. 412.

1424. *A frenzied wanderer.* The story of Orestes needs no narration; for what is here said, cf. the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus and the *Orestes* of Euripides.

1425. *found a grave.* See note on ll. 435–46.

1451–1520. Merope's speech prepares us for the pity which the death of Polyphontes now so near at hand should excite.

1511–12. *thou and I Were.* *First ed.* reads 'thou, like me, Wert'.

1518. *have learnt.* *First ed.* 'hast learnt'.

1523–76. This speech of Laias adjusts the balance in the case of Polyphontes, and makes us realize the justice of his fate. Palliation would have gone too far had Merope not been answered.

1524. *so dark in guilt.* *First ed.* 'so horrible'.

1548–51. For the allusions see notes on ll. 6 and 231.

1551. *a juggle to Cresphontes.* This Pausanias explains (iv. 3): 'Cresphontes had set his heart on getting Messenia as his share, so he entreated Temenus, and having won him over, he pretended to leave the question to be decided by lot. Temenus took a pitcher

with water in it and dropped into it the lots of Cresphontes and the sons of Aristodemus, an agreement having been made that they whose lot came up first should have the free choice of land. Temenus had made both the lots, but the lot of the sons of Aristodemus he made out of earth dried in the sun, and the lot of Cresphontes he made of earth baked in the fire. So the lot of the sons of Aristodemus was dissolved in the water; and the lot thus falling on Cresphontes he chose Messenia.'

1552–8. For the references here see notes on ll. 6 seqq.

1559. *Can houses*, &c. This may have been suggested by Tacitus, *Hist.* ii. 74 'Principatus scelere quaesitus non potest retineri subita modestia et prisca gravitate'.

1565. *Be their first-founded*, &c. *First ed.* 'If their first-founded order be maintain'd'.

1589. *this noon*. This exactly marks the time occupied by the action of the drama.

1590. *Be*. *First ed.* 'Go'.

1596–1683. In this stasimon the scansion is as follows. The First Strophe:

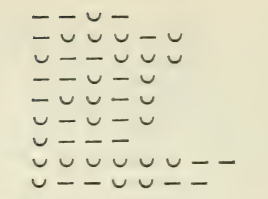
– – ∪ ∪ ∪
∪ ∪ – – ∪ ∪
∪ – ∪ ∪ – –
∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ – – ∪ ∪
∪ – – – ∪
∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – –
∪ ∪ – – – – –
∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –

Strophe II.

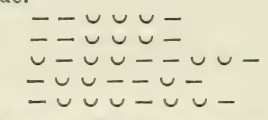
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – – – ∪
– ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪
∪ – ∪ – ∪
∪ ∪ – – – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪
∪ – ∪ – –
∪ – ∪ ∪ –
∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
∪ – – – ∪
∪ ∪ – ∪ – –
∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –

Strophe III.

– ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
∪ – – – ∪



Epode.



1603-45. *seed of Lycaon.* For Lycaon see note on ll. 846-9; he is said to have been the father of Callisto, a nymph and companion of Artemis. Zeus fell in love with her and became by her the father of Arcas, the eponymic hero and founder of Arcadia. On the banks of the river Ladon in Arcadia she gave birth to Arcas, and Artemis at the instigation of Here, or as some say Here herself, turned Callisto into a bear. Meanwhile the baby Arcas was given by Zeus to Maia, the mother of Hermes, who brought him up, and kept him concealed that Here might not destroy him. When Arcas grew up he chased as a hunter his own mother as she was in the form of a bear, but when he was on the point of slaying her, Zeus transformed her into a star and she became Arctos while Arcas was similarly transformed and became Arcturus or the Great Bear. See the whole story followed by Arnold, for there are many variations in it, as Ovid, *Met.* ii 410 seqq., and Euripides, *Helena* 376 seqq. See also Pausanias, viii. 3, who adds, in the proper spirit of the antiquary, 'but perhaps these stars are so called merely out of compliment to Callisto, for the Arcadians point to her grave.'

1611-12. *Whose trout are vocal, The Aroanian stream.* Cf. Pausanias (viii. 21): 'The road from the springs of the Ladon is a narrow defile beside the river Aroanius. . . . Among the fish in the Aroanius are the so-called spotted fish, they say these spotted fish sing like a thrush', adding, naïvely, 'I saw them after they had been caught, but I did not hear them utter a sound, though I tarried by the river till sunset when they were said to sing most.'

1616. *But the sweet-smelling,* &c. Arnold here recalls the beautiful passage in which Pindar describes how Evadne brought up Janus, *Olym.* vi. 90-2:

> *κέκρυπτο γὰρ σχοίνῳ βατίᾳ τ' ἐν ἀπειράτῳ*
> *ἴων ξανθαῖσι καὶ παμπορφύροις ἀκτῖσι βεβρεγμένος ἁβρὸν*
> *σῶμα.*

(For she had concealed him among the rushes and in impervious

brakes, his tender body covered thickly with the yellow and bright purple rays of the gilly-flowers.)

1619. *west-wind's.* *First ed.* 'West-Wind's'.

1628. *Whose striped shell.* Hermes, when a child, is said to have found at the entrance of his native cave in Cyllene a tortoise, the shell of which he took and threading strings across it invented the lyre. The story is most charmingly told in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes.

1650. *crag-perch'd Nonacris.* Nonacris is a town of Arcadia to the north-west of Pheneus, and is said to have derived its name from the wife of Lycaon. Pausanias notes the great height of the cliff on which it stood (viii. 17); see note on ll. 1064–5.

1653. *Of Styx.* See note on ll. 1064–5.

1655. *precipices of Khelmos.* Arnold has here anachronistically resorted to a modern name: in ancient time what is now Mount Khelmos was known as the Aroanian Hills (ὄρη Ἀροάνια); they were just above Nonacris (Pausanias, viii. 18).

1708. *time.* *First ed.* 'Time'.

1711. *bent.* *First ed.* 'thirst'.

1716. *known.* *First ed.* 'learn'd'.

1727. *I may.* I.e. I may keep silence.

1734. *Brazen-footed Fury.* From Sophocles, *Electra* 491 χαλκόπους Ἐρινύς.

1746–7. *Lemnian isle . . . Philoctetes.* Philoctetes, the son of Poeas, having been afflicted with a terrible malady contracted from a snake-bite, while trespassing on the sacred precincts of Athena Cryse, at the island of Cryse, was, on the advice of Ulysses and by the commands of the Atridae, landed and left on the desert island of Lemnos, where he remained during the whole period of the Trojan war. For his sufferings and ultimate triumph see the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles.

1751. *sink.* *First ed.* 'hide'.

1754. *he there did espy.* *First ed.* 'he hath seen lurking there'.

1758–79. The fine irony of this scene may be compared with that scene in the *Oedipus Rex* (945–1075), in which Oedipus is pushing his inquiry with Jocasta standing by, the secret now known to her.

1772. *envy.* *First ed.* 'Envy'.

1778. *Fate.* *First ed.* 'she'.

1781. *hatred.* *First ed.* 'Envy'.

1793. *dare.* *First ed.* 'will'.

1794–1881. The scansion of the First Strophe is

(1) — ∪ ∪ — ∪
(2) — ∪ ∪ — ∪
(3) ∪ — ∪ — ∪
(4) ∪ — ∪ —
(5) ∪ — ∪ — —

(6) ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪
(7) – – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –
(8) – – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –

Strophe II.

(1) ∪ ∪ – ∪ – ∪
(2) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(3) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
(4) – ∪ ∪ – –
(5) ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –

Strophe III.

(1) – – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪
(2) ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(3) – – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(4) ∪ – – – ∪ ∪ –
(5) ∪ – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ –
(6) – – – ∪ ∪ – ∪
(7) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – –
(8) ∪ ∪ – – – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(9) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(10) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(11) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ –
(12) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – – –
(13) ∪ ∪ – – – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(14) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – – ∪ –
(15) – – ∪ – – ∪ ∪ –
(16) – – – ∪ ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
(17) ∪ ∪ – – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ ∪
(18) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ –
(19) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – – ∪ ∪
(20) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
(21) ∪ ∪ – – ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
(22) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ ∪ – –
(23) ∪ ∪ – ∪ – –
(24) ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ –
(25) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – – –

The Epode.

(1) – ∪ ∪ – – – – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
(2) ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
(3) – ∪ ∪ – ∪
(4) – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
(5) – ∪ ∪ –
(6) – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
(7) – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
(8) – ∪ ∪ – –
(9) – ∪ ∪ – ∪ –
(10) – ∪ ∪ – –
(11) – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪
(12) – ∪ ∪ – –

Note throughout, and particularly in the Epode, how admirably the rhythm is in accordance with the sentiment. The connexion

of the stasimon with the action is that evil deeds cannot escape retribution, and that retribution has come at last. The reference to Hercules, who like Polyphontes had sinned and was punished terribly, is appropriate, for Polyphontes was a Heraclid. The reference to Hercules' subsequent apotheosis, when by agony his sin had been expiated, implies, no doubt, that when Polyphontes' crime had been terribly atoned for, he too might yet fare well after death. It thus conduces to the tranquillity which should be the final effect of tragedy.

1805. *decrees of Heaven.* On this fact the theology of Greek drama centres,—sin necessitates punishment, justice will vindicate itself by a law which never fails. So Aeschylus, *Choeph.* 310-14 :

Τοὐφειλόμενον
πράσσουσα δίκη μέγ' ἀϋτεῖ·
ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
πληγὴν τινέτω. δράσαντι παθεῖν,
τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ.

(Justice calls loudly as she exacts the debt, 'And for murderous blow let him pay murderous blow.' 'Suffering to the doer.' So goes the thrice-old saw.) Cf. too Euripides, *Frag.* 224 :

δίκα τοι δικαχρονίος· ἀλλ' ὅμως ὑποπέσουσ'
ὅταν ἔχῃ τιν' ἀσεβῆ βροτῶν.

(Justice, aye justice, is slow in coming ; but when she has an unholy man in her grasp she is on him before he knows it.) It would be useless to accumulate, either by the citation of maxims or examples from other tragedies, this truth and this sentiment, for Greek tragedy is permeated by them.

1810-13. *signal example . . . Heracles gave us.* The best commentary on all that follows will be found in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles.

1814. *for he sinn'd. First ed.* 'erred'. He sinned first in his treacherous murder of Iphitus, the son of Eurytus (see Sophocles, *Trachiniae,* 258-79) ; secondly, in sacking Oechalia and slaying Eurytus for motives of mere vengeance ; and thirdly, by insulting his wife Dejanira by making Iole the daughter of Eurytus his concubine, and introducing her as such into his home at Trachis.

1815-16. *Euboea . . . Cenaeum.* After sacking Oechalia and sending Iole to Trachis among his captives, Hercules landed at Cenaeum, a promontory of Euboea, and erected an altar to Zeus Cenaeus, sending his companion Lichas to Trachis to fetch him a white garment that he might wear it at the sacrifice, which he was preparing to make. His wife Dejanira, who had heard of his infatuation for Iole, now bethought her of what, long before, in her early life, the Centaur Nessus had told her. When dying from a poisoned arrow, shot by Hercules in revenge for his having

insulted her when carrying her across the river Evenus, he had told Dejanira that if ever her husband's love for her should fail, she could recover it by smearing a tunic with his (Nessus') blood, and inducing her husband to wear it. Of this she now thought, and sent instead of the white garment Hercules had asked for a robe anointed with the blood, some of which she had carefully preserved. Hercules put it on, and perished in horrible torment.

1820. *Oeta.* When Hercules, wrapped in the awful robe which was consuming him, knew that death was near, he had a funeral pyre raised on Mount Oeta, and as his son Hyllus and those about him had not the heart to set fire to it, a shepherd, one Poeas, who happened to be passing by, performed this office, and received as his reward the arrows of Hercules. Poeas became the father of Philoctetes, into whose possession the arrows afterwards passed.

1836. *chance-arrived Wanderer.* See preceding note.

1842. *Hebe.* Hebe was the daughter of Here, and Hercules, after his apotheosis, is said to have married her.

1845. *heritage of Neleus.* See note on l. 236.

1852. *four-town'd Doris.* Doris is a small mountainous district bounded by Aetolia, Southern Thessaly, the Ozolian Locrians, and Phocres, lying between Mounts Oeta and Parnassus. In this valley were the four towns which composed the Doric tetrapolis, namely Erineus, Boium, Cytineum, and Pindus.

1861. *destiny-brought. First ed.* 'Destiny-brought'.

1866. *Erinnys.* The name Erinnyes is said to be derived from an Arcadian word ἐρινύειν, to be angry, or according to others from ἐρεννᾶν, to hunt or search out; they are the Goddesses who lie in wait for criminals and secure their punishment. They were afterwards called by a euphemism the Eumenides or 'kindly disposed ones'.

1881. *Needle of ruin.* 'Needle', of course, means a sharp-pointed rock, such as the French call *Aiguilles*, and such as we preserve in the Needles off the Isle of Wight. This fine figure is adapted from Aeschylus, *Agamem.* 1005–6:

> καὶ πότμος εὐθυπορῶν
> ἀνδρὸς ἔπαισεν . . .
> . . . ἄφαντον ἔρμα.

(And the fate of the man in full course strikes straight on to the hidden reef of Justice.) The same figure is magnificently expanded in *Eumenides* 553–65, a passage of which Arnold was no doubt also thinking.

1895 seqq. *For when.* With the messenger's account of the murder of Polyphontis may be compared the account given of that of Neoptolemus in the *Andromache* of Euripides 1085–1165, on which it may have been modelled.

1914. *heaven. First ed.* 'Heaven'.

1997. *justice, order*, &c. *First ed.* 'Justice', 'Order','Vengeance.'
2002. *my son. First ed.* 'indeed'.
2009. *his. First ed.* 'thy'.
2013. *Mortal, the moderation.* Of all sentiments the most characteristic of the Greeks. The highest praise Pindar can give to Lampo, the father of the hero of the fifth Pythian Ode, is that he is one

μέτρα μὲν γνώμᾳ διώκων, μέτρα δὲ καὶ κατέχων.

(Studying to acquire moderation in thought, aye, and attaining it too.) Cf. his

μὴ μάτευε Ζεὺς γενέσθαι· πάντ' ἔχεις
εἴ σε τούτων μοῖρ' ἐφίκοιτο καλῶν,
θνατὰ θνατοῖσι πρέπει. *Isth.* iv. 16–18.

(Seek not to become Zeus, thou hast everything if a portion of these blessings come to thee; what is mortal befitteth mortals.)

2021–4. A conclusion characteristic of the Greek tragedies which, with Sophocles and Euripides generally, end flatly and abruptly, and with or without a moral tag. In Euripides the same moral tag, in the same words, with a slight variation in one of them, concludes five of his plays, leaving us with the impression that the last words were of no consequence, the audience not staying to hear them. Arnold's is plainly imitated from the conclusion of the *Electra*, but the last line is almost identical with the conclusion of the *Trachiniae*, κοὐδὲν τούτων ὅτι μὴ Ζεύς (and in all this there is nothing but Zeus).

ELECTRA

PRELIMINARY NOTE

The most illustrious of the Greek chiefs who were engaged in the Trojan War was their leader Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, one of the sons or grandsons—for the legends vary—of Atreus, and one of the grandsons or great-grandsons of Pelops. Before the Trojan war broke out he had married Clytemnestra, a daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, and of Leda. By her he had three daughters—Electra, Chrysothemis, and Iphigeneia, and a son Orestes. During Agamemnon's absence in Troy Aegisthus, a son of Thyestes and a near kinsman of Agamemnon, seduced Clytemnestra, she being already estranged from her husband in consequence of his having in the interests of public duty and patriotism sacrificed their daughter Iphigeneia at Aulis. On his return from Troy, from which he had brought with him as his captive and concubine Cassandra, Priam's youngest daughter, he was murdered by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; the motive of Aegisthus being to escape the consequences of the discovery of his adultery with Clytemnestra, and to possess himself as her husband of the throne; the motives of Clytemnestra being mainly the security of her paramour and herself, also revenge for the slaughter of her child Iphigeneia, and, according to Aeschylus, for Sophocles does not mention it, jealousy of Cassandra. To save the child Orestes from sharing his father's fate Electra induces the slave appointed to look after him to convey him secretly to his uncle Strophius, king of Phocis, who had married Anaxibia, Agamemnon's sister. Orestes there forms a close friendship with his cousin Pylades, the son of Strophius, and when he grows up not only hears the circumstances of his father's death from Electra and others, but is continually reminded by messenger from her of the duty of revenging it. Meanwhile Aegisthus and Clyte-

mnestra, so far from showing any remorse for their crime, in every way aggravate it. Its anniversary Clytemnestra celebrates by festivities, glorying in the insults which Aegisthus is always heaping on Agamemnon's memory. To the cruel oppression to which the two sisters are subjected, the gentle and weak Chrysothemis meekly submits, but Electra, alternately frenzied and depressed by this and by the memory of her father's fate and the shame of her mother's infamy, gradually hardens into the very incarnation of the spirit of hatred and revenge. Her only hope is that Orestes will some day come, and with him retribution. On this she daily and nightly broods, for this she longs and prays. One night Clytemnestra is alarmed by a dream. She thought Agamemnon had come to life again, and that she was with him, and that she saw him fixed his sceptre in the hearth and that it grew into a huge tree which overshadowed all the territory of Mycenae. Perplexed and troubled she ordered Chrysothemis to go and offer propitiating libations at the tomb of Agamemnon. Chrysothemis subserviently but unwillingly obeys. But at the very moment she was timidly preparing to carry out her mother's impious orders, while her more resolute sister was simultaneously pouring out her woes and wrongs to the Chorus, and calling for the Avenger, other and more appropriate offerings had been laid on the tomb. The Avenger had arrived. At this point the action of the drama begins.

PERSONS

Chorus of Argive Maidens.
Orestes.
Pylades. (*Mute.*)
Aegisthus.
Pedagogue *or* Attendant.
Clytemnestra.
Electra.
Chrysothemis.

ELECTRA

Ped. Son of that Agamemnon, who round Troy
Gathered the hosts of Greece, now with thine eyes
Mayst thou behold all that thy heart desired.
This is the ancient Argos of thy longing—
The precinct this of Io, frenzied maid:
Named of the god, the Slayer of the wolf,
The Place Lyceian see, Orestes, here—
Hera's famed temple yonder on the left:
But, whither our feet are come, deem that thou seest
None other than Mycenae, the rich city—
Mycenae, rich in gold; and, rich in slaughter,
Stand there the halls of the Pelopidae—
Whence from the slaying of thy sire, that day,
By thine own sister trusted to my hands,
I bore thee forth, and saved thee, and have reared,
Till lo thou art grown a man—thy sire's avenger.
Now, then, Orestes, and thou, best of friends,
Pylades, counsel quickly of the way.
For see, the sun is risen, and his beam
Wakes clear the matin voices of the birds,
And the murk night of stars is overworn.
Then linger not till folk come from the house,
But straight confer; since, where we stand, is now
No time for tarrying, but high time for deeds.

Or. O good old servitor, how well appears
By certain proof thy loyalty to us;
For, as a noble steed, though he be old,
In extreme peril pricks erect his ear,

Forgetting not his valiant strain, so thou
Both hastenest us and followest first thyself.
Hear then how I advise, and to my words
Give thou good heed; then let thy better wit
Correct me, if in aught I miss the mark.
When to the Pythian oracle I came
Inquiring of the god how best I might
Join issue with the murderers of my sire,
Phoebus to me made answer—mark me, how.
By guile, alone, aidless of shields or host,
He bade me snatch the retributive stroke.
So spake the voice prophetic. Therefore go—
Soon as occasion bids thee, enter straight—
Know all that is a-doing in the house;
Then, of thy knowledge, bring us certain word.
So old and lapsed in years, fear not that folk
Will know thee, or suspect, besprent with grey.
Be this thy word, thou art a stranger come
From Phocis, sent by Phanoteus their friend—
Friend and ally more potent have they none.
Then tell them, and confirm it with an oath,
Orestes by hard stroke of doom is dead—
At Delphi, in the race of whirling wheels,
From chariot flung: so let the story stand.
Meanwhile my father's tomb—our task prescribed—
We with libation first will duly crown
And wealth of tresses shorn, then back return,
An urn of brass uplifted in our hands—
Whereof thou knowest, in safe covert hid—
So to announce our welcome tidings false,
Tidings that this my body is no more,
But calcined now and charred to nothingness.
Since what offends me here, when death in name
Proves life indeed to me and wins renown?

Words fraught with gain, I trow, cannot be ill.
Have I not heard of wise men, not a few,
Dying in an idle rumour? Back they come—
Great out of knowledge straightway are they grown.
So living, doubt not, from this falsehood's cloud
I on my dazzled foes, starlike, shall break.
But, O my fatherland, and native gods,
Receive me prospering in my home-return;
And ye, halls of my fathers; for I come
With justice charged by heaven to make you clean;
And send me not dishonoured from the land—
Let me begin its wealth, and right my house.
My say is said; thee let it now concern,
Old man, to go, and of thy task have heed—
And forth will we; for so occasion bids,
The sovereign ruler of all deeds of men.

El. Ah me, alas!

Ped. Hark—from the doors sounded a woman's voice
Weeping, meseemed—some servant of the house.

Or. Is it the sad Electra? shall we bide
Here for awhile, and hearken her lament?

Ped. Not so: nought else let us attempt before
The bidding of the god we have performed,
Our work's inauguration—to pour out
Libations to thy sire; for this imports
The victory ours, and prospers all we do. [*They go out.*

El. O holy light of heaven,
And Earth's coequal, Air,
How many a mourning song of me,
And buffeting of how many a blow
Upon my bleeding bosom have ye heard,
When night, your dusky robe, ye leave behind!
And well ere now this house of horror knows,
And my detested couch,

What night-vigils I keep—
For my unhappy sire what dirge I make,
Whom, from a barbarous land returned,
From entertainment 'scaped of Ares fierce,
My mother and her paramour,
Aegisthus, ev'n as woodfellers an oak,
With murderous axe hewed to the nape;
And no compassion for these things,
Father, for thy so hideous piteous end,
From other lips than mine escapes:
But nowise will I fail
Of weeping and lamenting sore,
Till from my sight the shimmering sheen of stars,
And this fair daylight, fail;
But, as a nightingale
For Itys unconsoled,
From these ancestral doors will I
Still utter forth in all men's ears
A lamentable voice.
O home of Hades and Persephone,
O ghostly Hermes and thou sovereign Curse,
And dread divine Erinyes,
Whose eyes behold the foully slain,
And those adulterously spoiled—
Hearken and come and help,
Our father's murder foul avenge,
And speed my brother home to me—
To me, whose single strength
No more can countervail
This downward-dragging weight of woe.

Chor. Child of the guilty one,
Electra, how dost thou still
Waste in inveterate grief thy strength away
For Agamemnon, trapped, how long ago,

By cursed treachery of thy mother false,
And to the cowardly blow betrayed—may he
Who planned it perish—so God pardon me the word!
El. O noble hearts, your coming soothes my pain.
I know and understand full well—
Nothing escapes me that ye say—
Yet would I not give o'er,
Not cease from weeping for my hapless sire.
But ye whose love responsive beats
To every mood of mine,
Allow my raving thus—
Ah me—for pity!
Chor. But not with sobs or prayers
Thy father shalt thou bring
Back from the dark inevitable flood.
Yet thou with ceaseless tears dost lose thyself
In sorrow beyond reason uncontrolled—
Wherein is no remission of thy pain.
Why wilt thou woo thy misery?
El. Fool, who forgets a parent's piteous loss!
She fits my fancy rather,
That passionate and melancholy bird,
The messenger of Zeus, that makes her plaint
For Itys, Itys evermore.
O queen of sorrow, Niobe,
I hail thee goddess—thee
Who, rock-ensepulchred,
Art weeping, weeping still.
Chor. To thee, thee single in the world,
Daughter, no grief has come,
Touching thee more than those within—
Blood of thy blood, thy sisters both,
Chrysothemis and Iphianassa, who yet live—
And he too lives, his young life screened from sorrow,

Blest, whom our famed Mycenian land
Shall one day welcome home, her noblest son,
In God's good time returning,
Returning home—Orestes.
El. For whom I waiting, ah the weary while,
Poor wretch, no mother and no wife,
Fail still for waiting, wasted with my tears—
And see my lot, sad without end of sorrow;
But he forgets
What he endured, and what has heard:
For what to me
Of tidings comes, not soon belied?
For always he desires,
But yet desiring heeds not to appear.
Chor. Courage, O daughter, courage: still
High Zeus in heaven is king,
Who sees and governs all;
To whom thine all too bitter wrath committing,
Neither forget thy foes nor hate them overmuch.
Time as a god makes rough ways smooth:
For neither Agamemnon's son,
Who by the sea with Crisa's herdsmen bides,
Hath all forgotten thee,
No, nor the god by Acheron who reigns.
El. But now almost in dull despair
My days are fled, my strength is spent;
My wasted frame no parents tend,
No loving champion shields from wrong;
Lodged as an alien, scarce allowed
Beneath my father's roof a home,
Clad in this mean attire,
And standing by a table scantly spread.
Chor. O piteous voice, proclaimed his home return—
Piteous, when as he lay at feast,

When through the temples of thy sire
The steely jaws remorseless flashed and struck.
'Twas guile that planned, and lust that smote,
Whereof the dire embrace
A direful act engendered—
By whomsoever this was done,
A mortal or a god.
El. O bitter, bitter day
Beyond all days to me:
O night—O utter agony
Of that unutterable feast:
And O the hideous sight my sire beheld,
Those hands uplifted of the murderous twain,
Whose treason sapped my life, and murdered me:
For whom, supreme Olympian king,
Prepare such retributive fate,
Shall turn to dust the glittering prize,
Their deed achieved.
Chor. Be advised to speak no more:
Hast thou not wit to mark,
Wherefrom into this low estate,
Into what woes self-gotten,
Thou art fallen so miserably?
No light excess of pain thou to thyself procurest,
Still in thy brooding soul
Conceiving war; but war 'tis none,
To struggle with the strong.
El. I must, upon a dread compulsion must:
Nay, I know, my own heart full well I know;
But, whilst the dread is on my soul,
Not for the sake of life shall act of mine
Set to these miseries an end:
For what, kind hearts, but most unseemly words,
To all, to all that see aright,

Should then of me be spoken?
Ah, comfort, comfort, let me be:
For cureless shall my case be called,
Nor ever shall I cease from pain,
From pouring sigh on sigh.
Chor. Nay, but in love I counsel thee,
Ev'n as a careful mother might,
Add not to sorrows sorrow self-conceived.
El. But of my wretchedness what bound?
Shall we forget the dead? Were this then well?
Is there in men ingratitude so deep?
Never may I of such an one have praise;
Never may I, if still to any good
I cleave, in selfish ease abide therewith,
Checking, neglectful of my sire,
The pinion strong of passionate lament.
Because if he, being slain, woe worth the day,
Sleeps 'neath the earth, and is no more,
And those his enemies
Pay not their blood for his,
Then both regard of man and fear of God
From earth shall cease.
Chor. Daughter, I came, zealous alike for thee
As for myself; but if I speak not well
Have thou thy way, for I will follow thee.
El. I am ashamed, O ladies, if ye deem
Impatient overmuch my oft complaining:
But, since necessity compels my grief,
Chide not. How were it noble not to grieve,
Seeing my father's house oppressed with woe—
Yes, and I see the trouble day and night
Not ceasing, but prevailing more and more:
Who from the mother who bore me have found, first,
Hatred for love; then, under my own roof

I with my father's murderers abide;
They rule me, and from them comes all I have—
My having and my wanting, both are theirs.
Bethink you next, what sort of days I pass,
Seeing Aegisthus seated on the throne
That was my father's—seeing him clad in robes
That once my father wore, and pouring out
Libations at the hearth whereat he slew him,
And seeing this their crowning insolence,
The murderer crouching in our father's bed
Beside our wretched mother—if we must
Call her our mother, wedded to this man;
Shameless she is, and with the guilty one
Dwells, fearing no Avenger of these things;
But, even as though she gloried in her deed,
Hath found her out that fatal day, whereon
Our father by her treachery she slew,
And honours it with dances, and each month
To the Saviour Gods makes sacrifice of sheep.
And I, beholding, wretched, in the house
Wear out my strength with weeping, and lament
For the unholy feast, named of my sire,
Myself in secret: for I may not have
Even of weeping all my heart desires.
For then this woman—nobly can she speak—
With words of fierce reviling taunts me thus:
'How, impious and abominable girl?
Hast thou alone to bear a father's loss?
Are there no mourners in the world but thou?
My curse upon thee! May the gods below
Give thee no riddance of thy present griefs!'
So she insults me: save when one brings word
Orestes will come home; that makes her mad—
Standing, she thunders forth: 'Thou art the cause,

For is not this thy work, who from my hands
Didst steal Orestes, and convey him hence?
But know that thou shalt have thy fit reward.'
Such words she shrieks; and with her, at her side,
Her glorious partner prompts her, word for word,
This utter coward, this villain unredeemed,
Who fights his battles with a woman's help.
And all my life ebbs from me, waiting still
Until Orestes come to bid them cease.
So has he wrecked, still meaning, never doing,
Hopes that I had and had not, all alike.
So faring, O my friends, of modesty
Or reverence I wot not; help is none—
I must in evil plight learn evil ways.
Chor. Say, is Aegisthus near us in the house,
While thus we talk together, or gone abroad?
El. Doubt not of that. Think not that, were he near,
I to the doors had come. He is afield.
Chor. So with a better courage might I hold
Converse with thee, if this indeed is thus.
El. As in his absence, ask: what wouldst thou know?
Chor. I ask thee then: how sayest thou of thy brother—
That he will come, or lingers? Let me know.
El. He says; but, saying, does not what he says.
Chor. One well may pause, who has great work to do.
El. And yet I paused not when I rescued him.
Chor. Courage: he 's noble—will not fail his friends.
El. I trust, or else I had not lived so long.
Chor. Speak now no more: for at the doors I see
Chrysothemis, thy sister, of one sire
With thee, one mother, and to the tomb she bears
Gifts, such as to the dead men use to give.
Chrys. Sister, what voice again art thou come here
To utter in the doorway of the house?

Not even in all this time wilt thou be taught
Not idly to indulge a barren wrath?
Yet this I know, that I myself am grieved
To see the things I see: soon would I show
What love I bear them, could I find the strength.
But now ride out the storm with shortened sail
I must, nor dream of harm I cannot do.
And such a prudent course I would were thine.
Justice, I know, is not as I advise,
But as thou choosest: but, to keep my life
Free, I must yield in all things to the strong.

El. Oh strange, that thou, the daughter of such a sire,
Forgettest him, and carest for thy mother
For all these admonitions that I hear
Are taught of her, and nothing of thyself.
And yet—choose which thou wilt, to be unwise,
Or, being prudent, to forget thy friends:
Who sayest now that, couldst thou find the strength,
What hate thou bearest these, should soon be seen:
But I avenge my father all I can,
Unhelped by thee—I do, and thou dissuadest.
Is not this bad, and cowardly besides?
For teach me, or by me be taught, what gain.
Ceasing from lamentation, should I have?
I live: though ill, yet well enough for me,
And they are vexed, and honoured is the dead,
If there is any comfort in the grave.
Prate not to me of hating—vain pretence,
While with thy father's murderers thou abidest;
Never would I consent—not for the chance
Of all those gifts of thine that make thee proud—
To stoop myself to these: I grudge thee not
The wealthy table, the abounding life.
Not to offend myself, be this alone

My meat and drink: I covet not thine honours:
Nor thou, if thou wert wise. Men might have called thee
Child of the noblest father in the world:
But now be named thy mother's. So indeed
To many men thy baseness shall appear,
False to thy father's memory and thy friends.
Chor. Oh speak not aught in anger: for the words
Of both are profitable, couldst thou consent
To learn from her, and she again from thee.
Chrys. Used, ladies, to my sister's speech am I:
Nor on this theme should I have entered now,
Had I not heard of mischief threatening her,
Great mischief, that shall end her loud complainings.
El. Tell me your worst; withhold not. Of aught worse
Than this if thou canst tell me, I give in.
Chrys. I will say out the whole of what I know.
They purpose, if thou wilt not cease from weeping,
Thither to send thee, where thou shalt not see
The sunlight, but a prisoner all thy days.
Sing in the dark thy sorrows, banished hence.
Therefore bethink thee, and blame not me hereafter,
When falls the blow. Time to be wise is now.
El. Are they so purposed? Will they use me thus?
Chrys. Ay truly, when Aegisthus is returned.
El. If that be all, so may he come with speed!
Chrys. O hapless one, what speech, what prayer is this?
El. That he may come, if this he means to do.
Chrys. That thou mayst suffer—what? Where are thy wits?
El. That far from sight of you I may escape.
Chrys. And hast thou of thy present life no thought?
El. A fair and admirable life is mine?
Chrys. It might be, didst thou know how to be wise.
El. Teach me not thou, how to be false to friends.

Chrys. I teach thee not, but to the strong to yield.
El. Be it thine to flatter thus—'tis not my way.
Chrys. But not to fall through folly were no shame.
El. If I must fall, I will—my sire's avenger.
Chrys. I know my father will forgive me this.
El. Such words are fit for traitors to applaud.
Chrys. Wilt thou not hearken, and be ruled by me?
El. Long may it be before my wits so wander.
Chrys. Then I will do my errand and begone.
El. Whither art thou going? these offerings are for whom?
Chrys. My mother bids me pour them on the tomb.
El. How? on the tomb of him—her enemy?
Chrys. Slain by her very hand—so thou wouldst say.
El. Which of her friends advised? whose wish was this?
Chrys. Warned as I think by a terror of the night.
El. Gods of our house—now aid me—now at last!
Chrys. Does this that has scared her give heart to thee?
El. Tell me the vision, and I'll answer that.
Chrys. I know not, nor I cannot tell thee much.
El. Tell what thou knowest. Often a little word
Hath marred men's fortunes—and oft made them too.
Chrys. I hear them say, revisiting the light,
Our father's very presence as he lived
She saw; and that he took, and on the hearth
Planted, that sceptre which he wielded once,
But now Aegisthus: and from this there shot
Upward a fruitful bough, whose shade waxed great
Above Mycenae, and covered all the land.
Such tale I heard from one recounting it,
Who heard her to the Sun-god tell the dream;
But more than this I know not, save that she
Has sent me hither by reason of this fear.
Now by the gods who keep our house, I pray thee,

Hearken to me, and fall not through thy folly;
For, spurn me now, thou'lt seek me sorrowing.
El. Good sister, of all thou bearest in thy hands
Touch not the tomb with aught: for funeral gifts
Of this fell woman men nor gods allow
Thou to thy sire shouldst offer, or pour out
Libations: to the winds or to the dust
Deep-delved commit them, where they shall not come
Near to my father's bed: against her death,
Let them be treasured under ground for her.
Most shameless woman of all women is she,
Or else she had never thought, on him she slew
To pour libations, not of love but hate.
How think you? Seems it he will take these gifts,
Her buried lord, take and be pleased to take,
Even at her hand who slew him cruelly
As foe not friend, and mangled having slain,
And for ablution on his temples wiped
The blood-stains. Think you this which here you bear
Shall serve her for the quittance of her guilt?
It cannot be. Fling then these gifts away:
Cut rather from thy head its utmost tress
And give him—and from hapless me (small gifts
But yet my best) this poor unsuppliant lock,
And this my girdle, with no bravery decked;
And pray to him and bid him from the earth
Come graciously to help us from our foes,
And that Orestes with victorious strength
May live to trample down his enemies;
That so henceforth with wealthier hands than now
More costly gifts we to his tomb may bring.
Nay, for methinks, methinks his care it was
That visited her with such ill-favoured dreams.
Yet, sister, do this thing; so shalt thou help

Thyself and me, and help thy sire and mine—
Yea, even in the grave, our dearest still.
Chor. 'Tis piously advised: and, daughter, thou
Wilt do this service, if thy heart be right.
Chrys. Be it so: for of the right unmeet it were
We twain should wrangle, hastening not the deed.
Only, adventuring to do this thing,
I charge ye, friends, that ye betray me not;
For, if my mother hears it, well I know
That I shall rue my venture ere 'tis done.
Chor. Either a seer of dreams am I *strophe.*
Of wit and wisdom void,
Or Justice straight shall come,
The sovereign Seer, by whom I see,
Crowned with the might of a righteous deed—
Shall come, my child, and make no tarrying;
So is my heart grown strong,
Since this fair dream made music in mine ears.
For now I know, thy sire remembereth,
Lord of the hosts of Greece;
Nor hath forgetfulness made dull
The ancient axe two-edged with biting steel,
That struck him down with outrage and with shame.
With the tramp of an army's tread, *antistrophe.*
With multitudinous menace of lifted hands,
She shall come, the Erinys, whose feet are brass—
From her dreadful ambush shall start and come.
On the impious ones there fell
Lust, and adulterous haste
To a bed forbidden, a bridal cursed.
Therefore I know, for this
We not, ah not in vain shall look;
Not unaghast the murderous pair shall see
Nearer and nearer the horror creep:

Or else there is no art of men
To interpret dreams of fear,
And words oracular,
Unless this dream shall turn to good.
O woful charioting *epode.*
Of Pelops long ago!
O curse abiding, on this land that fell!
For, since beneath the wave
Sank Myrtilus on sleep,
From the chariot all of gold
With rash outrageous hand
Flung headlong forth,
Not from that day to this
Out of this house hath ceased
The tale of outrage, woe on woe.

Clyt. At large once more thou rangest, as it seems,
Aegisthus absent—he who kept thee still
From gadding thus abroad to shame thy friends.
But, now that he is hence, thou hast no heed
Of me: although to many, many a time
Thou hast complained that I, unjust and harsh,
Provoke thy spirit, insulting thee and thine.
What insult, when I do but give thee back
Taunts for the ceaseless taunts I hear from thee?
Thy father—father still, thy one pretence—
By me was slain. By me? I know it well:
'Tis true, past all denying, so he was.
For Justice slew him, not my hand alone:
And, wert thou not past feeling, thou'dst have helped,
When this thy father, for whom still flow thy tears,
Dared slay thy sister for a sacrifice—
Of all men he—who only was her father,
And had not borne for her a mother's pangs.
Instruct me now, for whom paid he such price—

My daughter's blood? Thou'lt tell me, for the Greeks?
To slay my daughter was no right of theirs.
For Menelaus then, his brother, he slew
My child—and should not answer me for this?
Had not that brother two children of his own,
Who should have rather died, children of him,
Yea and of her, for whom our ships were launched?
Or was Death's appetite so nice, to feast
Upon my children's flesh and not on hers?
Or did this most unnatural father love
His brother's offspring, careless for his own?
Why, what a father—senseless and dull—was this!
However we may differ, so think I:
And so would say the slain one, might she speak.
So now for this deed's sake that I have done
My heart fails not: and, if thou'rt unconvinced,
Be just thyself before thou judgest me.

El. This time thou scarce wilt say that I began
The bitterness, and then by thee was chidden:
Give me but leave, I'll plead and plead aright
Both for my father and my sister too.

Clyt. Permission 's thine: and, hadst thou always been
So humble, I had not loathed to hear thy voice.

El. Thus then. My father thou hast slain. What word
More damning is there of thy guilt than this—
Justly or not, no matter. But I shall prove,
Just deed 'twas none—but thou wast won to it
With wooing of a traitor, now thy lord.
Ask huntress Artemis, what angered her
At Aulis so to check those thronging winds.
Or, since from her thou canst not, hear from me.
I hear it said, my father roamed one day
Her glades light-hearted, and with his footfall scared
An antlered stag with dappled skin, and spoke

A boastful word, and shot, and pierced its throat.
Therefore Latona's daughter being wroth
Held back the Greeks until thy sire should give
For the slain beast his daughter, life for life.
And so he slew her : for no otherwise
Homeward or Troyward had our fleet release.
Therefore on hard compulsion, loth to yield,
He slew her, nowise for his brother's sake.
Yet, were it as thou hast said, had he done this
All for his brother's cause, yet even so
Shouldst thou have slain him? By what law were this?
Take heed, appointing such a law for men,
That thou appoint not sorrow for thyself.
For, if blood must be shed for blood, thou first
Shouldst die, if justice should be done on thee.
But see to it, if thy pretext be not false.
For tell me, an thou wilt, for what cause now
We see thee do most shameful deeds of all,
Who dost beside that murderer couch, with whom
Thou didst conspire before to slay my sire,
And bear'st him children, and hast cast out for him
The stainless children of thy stainless lord.
How shall I praise this thing? Thou'lt tell me, this,
This also is the price of daughter's blood?
'Tis foully done, say as thou wilt. To wed
Foes, for a daughter's sake, is no fair thing.
Nay, but one may not speak nor counsel thee,
Who sparest no words to tell, how I thy daughter
Am still thy slanderer : yea, and I deem thee less
A mother than a mistress unto me,
Who live a grievous life, and sore beset
With all hard usage of thy lord and thee.
But out of reach the other, scarce escaped,
The sad Orestes, wastes a hapless life :

Of whom I hear thee rate me that he lives
Reared up by me, for vengeance. Could I this,
Be sure indeed I would. If this be all,
Cry, cry aloud, and call me as thou wilt
Unnatural, loquacious, unabashed.
For if indeed I know such deeds as these,
Methinks of such a child thou shouldst be proud.
Chor. I see, she breathes out fury: but, if her words
Chime still with justice, this she heeds no longer.
Clyt. And why should I have any heed of her,
Who me her mother has with such words reviled—
She a mere child besides? Seems she not one
To go all lengths and never blench or blush?
El. Nay, that I blush for this, I'd have thee know,
Although thou thinkest not; too well I see,
Unseemly and ill-timed my words have been.
But thy unkindness, and thine acts to me,
These in my own despite have made me mad.
For shameful deeds by shameful deeds are taught.
Clyt. Thou shameless thing, my words and acts and I,
Methinks, have made thee over-garrulous.
El. My speech is thine, not mine: thou doest the deeds,
And 'tis the deeds that find themselves the words.
Clyt. So help me Artemis, but thou shalt rue
This boldness, when Aegisthus comes again.
El. So you fly out in anger—though you gave me
Leave to speak all my mind; but you'll not hear.
Clyt. May I not sacrifice without thy clamour,
Now, having left thee free to say thy say?
El. Hinder, not I: I pray you, sacrifice!
Chide not my speaking, for I'll speak no more.
Clyt. Who does my bidding, let her lift on high
The gift of every fruit, that I may pray

To Phoebus here to rid me of my fears.
Protector, Phoebus, hear and understand,
Although my speech be darkened. For I speak
In no friend's ears, nor with this maiden near
Must I unfold my meaning to the light,
Lest she with spite and rumour, thousand-tongued,
Through all the city scatter false report.
But hear me thus: thus I will dare to speak.
The vision which in doubtful dreams this night
I saw, O lord Lyceius, let it be
Accomplished, if 'tis sent me for my good;
If harm, upon my enemies let it fall:
And suffer not whoever deem by guile
To cast me down out of this high estate:
So let me live a life exempt from ill,
Possessing still the sceptre and the house,
And dwelling with the friends with whom I dwell
Lead peaceful days—and of my children those
Who neither bear me spite nor cause me sorrow.
Phoebus, Lyceius, hear me graciously,
And be it to all of us as I desire.
The rest, although my lips pronounce not, yet
I deem that thou, being a god, dost know.
All things are open to the sons of Zeus.

Ped. Ladies, I pray you tell me, is this house
The palace of Aegisthus, of the king?

Chor. No other, friend; thyself hast guessed aright.

Ped. And do I rightly deem this lady here
His wife? who looks none other than a queen.

Chor. As thou hast said; thine eyes behold the queen.

Ped. Lady, all hail. Bearing glad news I come
To thee and to Aegisthus, from a friend.

Clyt. I hail the word: and who with these glad news
Has sent thee hither—this I first would know.

Ped. From Phocian Phanoteus I bear great tidings.
Clyt. What tidings, friend? speak, for from one so kind,
Kind words that thou wilt utter, well I know.
Ped. Orestes—briefly to tell my tale—is dead.
El. O woful day, a fatal tale to me!
Clyt. How, sirrah—how say you? Hearken not to her.
Ped. I said and say, Orestes, lady, is dead.
El. O fatal tidings, how am I undone!
Clyt. See to thyself: but, sirrah, thou to me
Speak all the truth, and tell me how he died.
Ped. Thou shalt hear all, for therefore was I sent.
To the pride of Greece, the festival renowned,
For Delphic contests' sake Orestes came;
And when he heard the proclamation loud
That heralded the foot-race, first of trials,
He entered bright the lists, worshipped by all,
And ran, till starting-point and goal were one,
And crowned with honour and victory came thereout.
Few among many I know not how to tell
Of the victorious feats of such a man:
But this I say—that of no trial the judges
Proclaimed decision, single or double race—
Pentathlon also, all the fivefold custom—
But he of one and all bore prize away,
By men hailed happy—he an Argive styled,
By name Orestes, Agamemnon's son,
Who of all Greece gathered the famous host.
These things indeed were so: but, when a god
Stops the strong runner, hardly shall he flee.
For he, another day, when charioteers
At sunrise matched their speed in the swift race,
With many another entered for the prize.
One was Achaean, one from Sparta, two—
Masters of yoked cars—were Libyan-born;

And he with these driving Thessalian mares
Came fifth; next him with chestnut colts the sixth,
Aetolian; a Magnesian was the seventh;
Aenian by race the eighth, and white his steeds;
A ninth came thither from Athens, built by gods;
One more Boeotian, making the chariots ten.
So, standing where their place the appointed umpires
Assigned them by the lot, and ranged their cars,
All at the trumpet's sound they started: all,
Chiding their horses on, shook loose the reins
Together, and the plain at once was filled
With din of rattling cars, and dust that rose
Skyward; and all together in a throng
Spared not the goad, when one from out the press
Shot past their axles and the snorting steeds.
For all about their backs and rolling wheels
The breathings of the horses foamed and smote.
And ever, against the pillar where they turned,
Orestes grazed his axle, and his reins
Loosed on the right and tightened on the left;
And all the chariots held erect their course,
Till those unbridled colts by the Aenian driven
From all restraint broke loose, and made the round
A sixth time, but the seventh, swerving, full
Against the team Barcaean dashed their foreheads:
And so from one disaster each against each
Crashed and heeled over, and with the chariot-wrecks
All the Crisaean plain was overstrewn.
This he from Athens, wise in his charioting,
Marked, and pulled sideways, and so rode out the storm—
Letting its surge seethe past him in mid-course.
Last drave Orestes, holding back his colts,
And trusted still his prowess at the close:
But, when he saw that other left alone,

His steeds in the ears with one sharp cry he smote,
And so, full speed, came after; until abreast
The chariots raced, and of the charioteers
Now this, now that, with head thrust forth, showed first.
And safe till now Orestes every round
Steered still, ill-starred, steadfast his steadfast car;
But the last time, loosing the left-hand rein,
Even while the horse turned, struck and knew it not
The edge of the pillar, and the rim o' the nave
O' the axle splintered; and himself behind
Slipped 'twixt the rails, and tangled all amid
The dainty reins: and down he fell on the plain,
So that his colts were scattered in mid-course.
And when the people saw him from the car
Fallen, a cry of pity outbrake to see
What deeds the youth had done, and how he fared,
Now dashed to the earth, and now feet uppermost
Tossed to the sky; until the charioteers,
Scarce having checked the fury of his steeds,
Loosed him all bleeding, all his poor limbs torn
And battered past all knowing of his friends.
Him on the pyre we burned, and hither now
Come chosen men from Phocis, in one small urn
Bearing the sad dust of that mighty form,
That in his native earth he may have rest.
There is no more to say. A piteous tale
To tell, but in the seeing, to us who saw,
Greatest of all evils that ever I have seen.

Chor. Ah me, for now, I think, the race and name
Of my old masters is from earth evanish'd!

Clyt. Zeus, what shall I say—this is glad news to me.
Or dire news and yet good news? oh 'tis bitter,
That by my own calamities I live!

Ped. Lady, why does thy heart fail for this hearing?

Clyt. 'Tis dire to be a mother—howe'er unkind,
The child of one's womb one cannot learn to hate.
Ped. Then all in vain it seems that we have come.
Clyt. Nay, not in vain. How shouldst thou say in vain?
If hither you bring to me proof of his death—
His death—whose life from my life sprang, but he
Would none of my milk, and from my nursing fled
And lived an alien, and since he went from hence
Saw me no more; but called me murderess
Of his father, and with dire reckoning menaced me,
So that the kind sleep neither by night nor day
Covered my eyes, but still the tyrannous time
Seemed ever to drag me onward to my doom.
But now, for on this day I am rid of fear
From him and from this maiden, who, worse plague,
Dwelt with me, sucking from me day by day
My sheer heart's blood—now, now methinks in peace,
Untroubled by her threats, my days shall pass.
El. Ah woe is me: for now, Orestes, now
I may lament for thee, when, being thus,
By thy mother thou art mocked. Is it not well?
Clyt. Not well with thee: but well, being thus, does he.
El. Nemesis of the dead—scarce dead—oh hear!
Clyt. Who should be heard, she heard; and well ordained it.
El. Mocker, mock on; this is thy triumph's hour.
Clyt. Thou and Orestes shall not spoil me this.
El. Nay, we are spoiled, no talk of spoiling thee.
Clyt. Much thanks indeed, friend, should thine errand win
If she is silenced of her noisy grief.
Ped. So let me take my leave, if this is well.
Clyt. Not so; for so not worthily of me,
Or of the friend who sent thee, shouldst thou fare.
Come thou within; and let this maiden here

Proclaim aloud her sorrows and her friends.
El. Seems she not, like one grieved and sick at heart,
This miserable mother, for her son
So slain to make dire weeping and lament?
Nay, laughing she is gone. O me, alas,
Orestes, dearest, thy death is death to me!
With thee are gone, plucked from my heart away,
All hopes that tarried still to comfort me,
That thou wouldst come, living, to avenge thy sire
And me, unhappy. Now whither shall I go?
For now I am alone—now thou art lost,
Thou and my sire. And henceforth in the house
Of these my father's murderers, whom I hate,
The life of a slave is mine. O goodly lot!
Ah no, but never any more will I
Live 'neath their roof, but at their gate will lay
My withered, friendless life until I die.
Now therefore let them kill me, those in the house,
If they are weary of me: death is sweet,
But life is grievous—I have no heart to live.
Chor. Where, Zeus, are thy lightnings—O Sun-god, where is thy beam—
If ye, these things beholding, hide them, all heedless?
El. Woe and alas!
Chor. O daughter, why art thou weeping?
El. Alas and alas!
Chor. No rash word utter.
El. Thou'lt be my death.
Chor. How?
El. If for the dead, dead past all doubt,
Hope ye still shall suggest,
On me, consumed with my sorrow,
The more ye shall trample.
Chor. Nay, for I know that King Amphiaraus,

By reason of golden snares of women,
Was buried alive; and now
Under the earth—
El. Alas the day!
Chor. In fullness of force he reigns.
El. Alas!
Chor. Alas indeed! for the murderess—
El. Was slain?
Chor. Yes.
El. I know it, I know it,
For the mourner a champion arose:
But to me no champion is left,
For the one who remained is lost,
Snatched hence and gone.
Chor. Unhappy thou art, hapless thy plight.
El. I also know this, too well I know it,
Who lead a life, month after month,
All blindly surging
With troubles dire and dark.
Chor. We saw indeed whence flowed thy tears.
El. No more then, oh no more,
Entreat me where——
Chor. What wouldst thou say?
El. Where now no more shall visit me
Comfort of any hope of him,
My brother—son of my noble sire.
Chor. To all men death must come.
El. Even as it came to him, the hapless,
Amidst the tramplings of racers' hoofs—
To encounter with dragging of dainty reins?
Chor. O outrage, baffling thought!
El. So is it, if in the land of strangers
His ashes rest, not by my hands entombed,
Neither burial nor tears having won from me.

Chrys. Joy wings my feet, O sister, hitherward,
So that I come in haste, and heed not how:
For joyful news I bring, that makes an end
Of all thy days of sorrow and of tears.
El. How shouldst thou find help for my sorrows, thou,
Whereof no cure is possible to see?
Chrys. Know, for I tell thee, Orestes is returned—
His very self, plain as thine eyes see me.
El. What, are you mad, you who are miserable,
And would you mock our sorrow, yours and mine!
Chrys. No, by our father's hearth, no bitter jest
Is this—but fact; he has come back to us.
El. Alas, poor fool, and from whose lips I prithee
Heard you this tale that you so rashly trust?
Chrys. My own eyes told me, they alone: plain proof.
They saw, and what they told me I believe.
El. Poor soul, what proof saw you? what sight was this,
That kindled in thy heart this fatal fire?
Chrys. 'Fore heaven, hear what I saw: that, having heard
Then you may deem me wise, or else a fool.
El. Nay then, speak on, if speaking comforts thee.
Chrys. Forthwith I'll tell thee all that I have seen.
When to our father's ancient tomb I came,
At top of the mound libations freshly poured
Of milk I saw, and all the sepulchre
Wreathed round about with every flower that grows;
And seeing it I marvelled, and I looked,
Lest some one should be near me, at my side;
But when I saw that I was all alone,
Nearer the tomb I crept, and on the edge
Of the mound beheld a lock of hair, new-shorn;
And at the sight was borne upon my soul—
As it were a well-known form—it seemed a sign

From him whom most of men I love, Orestes:
And in my hand I took it, and my tongue
Refrained, but tears of joy o'erflowed my eyes:
And now full well I know, as then I knew,
That this fair tress of hair was none but his.
Who else should set it there, except us twain?
And 'twas not I who did it, that I know,
Nor thou—how shouldst thou? when thou canst not even
Go forth, unchidden, to the gods to pray.
Our mother then? When was she minded ever
To do such things? how could she, we not knowing?
But from Orestes' hand these offerings came.
Sister, take heart. No constant law of heaven
Deals to the selfsame life the selfsame doom.
Our lot before was bitter: but full-fraught
Perchance with lasting good this day shall prove.

El. Alas thy folly: I hear thee, pitying.

Chrys. How? are they not glad tidings that I bring?

El. Thou knowest not whither, unto what dreams thou'rt borne.

Chrys. Do I not know that which mine eyes have seen?

El. Fool, he is dead: of safety as from him
There is an end: to him look thou no more.

Chrys. O hapless—from what tongue heard'st thou such news?

El. From one who when he died stood by and saw.

Chrys. Where is this witness? wonder overcomes me.

El. Welcomed within—not grievous to my mother.

Chrys. Out and alas! by whom then had been sent
Those lavish offerings to our father's tomb?

El. Most likely, to my thinking, they were brought
In memory of Orestes who is dead.

Chrys. O luckless: and I hasted with such joy
Such news to bring: not knowing as it seems

Our plight, how woful: but, having come, I find
Trouble on trouble—ills both old and new.
El. So stands thy case; but hearken now to me—
This weight of present woe thou soon wilt lighten.
Chrys. What? shall I bid the dead arise and live?
El. Nay, there was no such folly in my thoughts.
Chrys. What wouldst thou have, that I have strength to do?
El. I'd have thee do my bidding and be bold.
Chrys. If in the doing is gain, I'll not refuse.
El. Look to it: without the striving nought succeeds.
Chrys. I see it: command my help, whate'er I can.
El. Then hearken, what to do I am resolved.
Thou knowest, I think, that countenance of friends
Now we have none: of all we had, we are
By death bereft—bereft, and left alone.
Now therefore I, who, while to me came news
My brother lived and prospered still, had hope
That he would come, avenger of my sire—
I turn, since he is gone, to whom but thee—
The murderer of our father bidding thee
With me thy sister tarry not to slay
Aegisthus: for 'tis time I should speak out.
How long wilt thou be patient—in what hope—
When all our hopes are wrecked? and thou who shouldst grieve,
Being disinherited of thy father's wealth,
And shouldst lament, that, all thy life till now,
Thy youth is spent unwedded and unloved.
Nay, and to marriage hope not any more
Thou shalt attain: for not so void of wit
Is this Aegisthus, as to let children spring
From thee or me, a certain harm to him.
But, if to my advice thou dost consent,

I tell thee first, pious thou shalt be called
Both by thy father and thy brother dead:
And free, as thou wast born, thou shalt be called
Henceforth, and worthy marriage shalt obtain,
For to the noble all men are wont to look.
Bethink thee, too, what honourable report
For thee and me, consenting, thou shalt win.
Who, countryman or stranger, seeing us,
Shall not with suchlike praises honour us—
'Behold ye these two sisters, O my friends,
Who wrought deliverance for their father's house,
Who against foes firm-planted in their pride
Drew sword the foremost, sparing not their lives:
These ye should love, these twain should all revere:
Yea, in all feasts and high solemnities
These women, brave as men, let all men praise.'
Such things of us shall everywhere be spoken;
Living or dead, our glory shall not fail.
O sister, then, be counselled, for thy father
Strive, for thy brother endure, and rescue me,
Rescue thyself from sorrow, minding this,
Ignoble life is shame for noble men.

Chor. For one who speaks alike and one who hears,
Forethought is helpful in such case as this.

Chrys. Were she not bent on folly, O my friends,
Ere she had spoken thus, she would have first
Remembered caution, which she remembers not.
For, on what hopes intent, dost thou so arm
Thyself with rashness, and call me to follow?
What, art thou blind? Woman, not man, art thou,
And for thine enemies in strength no match.
And them their fortune prospers day by day;
Ours ebbs and dwindles ever, and comes to nought.
Who then shall think to vanquish such a man,

And yet come off unscathed, nor rue his folly?
Look well, lest, if they hear what thou hast spoken,
Our evil plight be soon exchanged for worse.
It steads us not nor profits us at all,
To win fair fame and yet ignobly die.
For not to die is worst, but when to die
One craves, and even this he may not have.
Nay, I entreat, or ever past retrieval
We perish, and leave desolate our house,
Refrain thine anger. All that thou hast spoken
Will I unsay with silence, and defeat.
But oh, thyself learn prudence, though so late,
Not to contend, so weak, with them so strong.
Chor. Hear her. For men there is no gain to get
Better than prudence and a sober mind.
El. Thou hast spoken nought unlooked for. Well I knew
Thou wouldst reject the proffer that I made,
But single-handed and alone this deed
I needs must do: it shall not go undone.
Chrys. Alas!
Would thou hadst been so minded in that day
Our father died: what might'st thou not have done?
El. My heart was right, but feebler were my thoughts.
Chrys. Study to keep such thoughts thy whole life long.
El. This counsel purports then no help from thee.
Chrys. Of rash attempts disaster needs must come.
El. I praise thy wisdom, hate thy cowardice.
Chrys. Even thy praise with patience I will hear.
El. Never of me shalt thou have that to bear.
Chrys. To prove that 'never' craves the coming time.
El. Begone, I say: thou art unprofitable.
Chrys. Not so: 'tis thou that art incorrigible.
El. Go, to thy mother all the tale repeat.
Chrys. Nor do I hate thee with so dire a hate.

El. But know at least how thou dishonourest me.
Chrys. Dishonour thee—not I, but care for thee.
El. And must I follow then thy rule of right?
Chrys. For, when thou'rt wiser, *then* be guide to both.
El. Strange that, who speaks so well, should speak amiss.
Chrys. Thy words have hit the fault whereto thou cleavest.
El. How? what I speak, seems it to thee not right?
Chrys. But sometimes what is right is mischievous.
El. By such a law I do not choose to live.
Chrys. Persist in this, and thou shalt praise me yet.
El. Persist I shall, no whit dismayed by thee.
Chrys. Must it be so? Wilt thou not think again?
El. Most hateful 'tis to think, and think amiss.
Chrys. It seems thou wilt not heed what I advise.
El. Not now, but long ago I have resolved.
Chrys. I leave thee then: for neither thou my words
Nor I thy temper can endure to praise.
El. Why then go in: I shall not follow thee,
Howe'er thou mayst desire it: since withal
Much folly it is to follow a fruitless quest.
Chrys. Why then, if in thine own eyes thou art wise,
I to thy wisdom leave thee: by and by,
Standing in evil plight, my words thou'lt praise.
Chor. Why, though the true-hearted birds of the air they see *str.* 1
Careful to cherish those
Who give them life and all good things—
Oh, why do men likewise
A like devotion fail to pay?
Nay, but not long delayed
(By the lightning flashed from the hand of Zeus,
By heavenly Themis, no!)
The day of reckoning comes.

O voice that soundest
To the dead beneath the earth,
In the ears of the sons of Atreus
Proclaim it there, a piteous cry
A joyless tale of shame:
That the strength of their house is waxen faint, *ant.* 1
And of their children now
With daily interchange of love
Discordant strife no more agrees.
Electra forsaken breasts the storm alone,
Unhappy, like the all-plaintive nightingale,
Lamenting always for her sire,
And recking not of death,
Ready to yield her life,
Might she but triumph o'er the twofold curse:
What child her nobleness shall match?
For no one who is noble deigns *str.* 2
Basely to live, and cloud
With obloquy fair fame—
O daughter, daughter, ev'n as thou
Hast chosen all thy days
To weep with them that wept,
That so one day, when the unlovely deed
Was armed and ready, thou mightest win
A twofold praise in one,
Wise and most noble of daughters to be called.
Oh may I see thee living yet *ant.* 2
As far in might and wealth
Above thy foes, as now
Beneath their hand thy life is crushed:
Since I have found thy feet
Set in no goodly lot;
But, touching nature's highest laws,
I see thee bear away

The meed of the noblest, for that thou fearest Zeus.
Or. Ladies, have we heard true, and do we bend
Our steps aright, whither we fain would come?
Chrys. What seek you, and with what intent come hither?
Or. To the house of Aegisthus I have asked my way.
Chrys. Your goal is reached; your guide shall forfeit nothing.
Or. Which of all you would tell to those within
The longed-for coming of our company?
Chrys. This maiden, if the nearest should announce it.
Or. Go, lady, and tell them in the house, that men
Are come from Phocis, who would see Aegisthus.
El. Out and alas! of rumour that we heard
It cannot be ye bring us proofs to see?
Or. Thy tale I know not: aged Strophius
Hath charged me, of Orestes to bring tidings.
El. What tidings, friend? How I grow chill with fear!
Or. He is dead: a little dust is all of him,
Which here, thou seest, in this small urn we bear.
El. Woe 's me, now all too clear, this grief, it seems,
My hands may handle, and my eyes behold.
Or. If for the fate of Orestes flow thy tears,
Know that within this urn his ashes rest.
El. Friend, in my hands, I pray thee, if it holds
Him, let me take this urn, that I may weep
And wail my fill, not for this dust alone,
But for myself withal and all my house.
Or. Bring hither and give to her, whoe'er she be:
For not as one who loved him not she asks,
But either a friend, or born his kinswoman.
El. O poor last relic of Orestes' life,
Dearest of men to me, with hopes how other,
Than forth I sent, do I receive thee back!
Now in these hands I take thee, and thou art nought;

But beautiful and bright I sent thee forth,
Child, from thy home. Oh would that I had died,
Or ever to a strange land I sent thee hence,
And stole thee in my arms, and saved from death,
That on that day thou mightest have lain dead,
And of thy father's tomb have earned a share.
Now, far from home, in a strange land exiled,
A woful end was thine, no sister near:
And, woe is me, I neither laved thy limbs
And decked with loving hands, nor, as was meet,
Snatched this sad burthen from the scorching fire:
By hands of strangers tended thou art come,
A little handful in this little urn.
Alas me, for my nursing long ago,
Unprofitable care, that with sweet pain
I ofttimes spent for thee; for thou wast never
Thy mother's darling, rather mine; nor they
O' the house—but I it was, whom all were wont
Sister at once to call and nurse of thee.
Now thou art dead, and all in a day these things
Have ceased to be—all with thy passing swept
As by a whirlwind hence. Thy father is gone,
And I am dead, thy sister; and thine own life
Has past from earth. Our foes laugh us to scorn,
Our mother, nay no mother, is mad with joy:
Of whom so often thou didst send secret word,
Thou'dst come to be avenged on her; but now
Hard fortune, thine and mine, robs me of this,
Sending me hither, in thy dear body's stead,
Mere dust and shadow of thee, and good for nought.
Ah me, alas!
O piteous ashes! alas and woe is me!
O sadly, strangely—
Alas, my brother!—

Thus journeying hither, how me thou hast undone!
Undone—undone indeed, O brother mine!
Therefore to thy dark chamber take me in;
Me, dust to dust, receive; that I may dwell
Henceforth i' the dark with thee. For, living, I shared
With thee, and shared alike; and now in death
Not to be sundered from thy tomb I crave,
For in the grave I see that grief is not.

Chor. Mortal, Electra, bethink thee, was thy sire,
Orestes mortal: moderate thy grief:
This is a debt we all of us must pay.

Or. Alas, what shall I say? what words attempt,
Where all words fail? No more can I refrain.

El. What is your trouble? Why have you spoken this?

Or. Is this Electra's form, far-famed of men?

El. It is no other, in most distressful plight.

Or. Alas then for thy lamentable case!

El. Surely, good friend, thy tears are not for me?

Or. O form defaced with foul and impious wrong!

El. On none but me, friend, thy reproaches light.

Or. Alas me, for thy loveless hapless life!

El. Why dost thou bend thy weeping eyes on me?

Or. How less than nothing of my wrongs I knew!

El. Wherein, of what was said, discerned you this?

Or. Reading in thy face the blazon of thy grief.

El. And yet of all my wrongs you see but few.

Or. How could there be more hateful sights than these?

El. That 'neath one roof with the murderers I dwell——

Or. Of whom? from whence hast thou this hint of crime?

El. My father; and me, perforce, they make their slave.

Or. Who are they that constrain thee to their will?

El. One called my mother, no mother by her deeds.

Or. With blows, or cruelty in thy life? Say, how?
El. With blows and cruelty, and every wrong.
Or. And hast thou none to help, and hinder this?
El. Not I, for, whom I had—his dust is here.
Or. O hapless, how thy sight hath stirred my pity!
El. Thou art the first that ever pitied me.
Or. I am the first that ever shared thy grief.
El. Art thou some kinsman, that I have not known?
Or. This I could answer, if these are friends who hear me.
El. Yes, friends they are, whom speaking you may trust.
Or. Set down this urn then, and I'll tell thee all.
El. Friend, bid me not do this—so help thee heaven!
Or. Do as I say, thou shalt not do amiss.
El. I do entreat thee—take not my dearest from me.
Or. I say thou shalt not.
El. Ah woe is me for thee, Orestes, if thy burial is denied me.
Or. Cease; for it is not right that thou shouldst weep.
El. How wrong, to weep my brother who is dead?
Or. 'Tis not for *thee* to use such words of him.
El. And am I so dishonoured by the dead?
Or. No man dishonours thee: this is not thine.
El. How, if I hold the body of Orestes?
Or. 'Tis none of his, save as our words have feigned it.
El. Where is the tomb of my most luckless brother?
Or. No tomb has he; we bury not the living.
El. How say you, boy?
Or. All that I say is true.
El. Orestes *lives?*
Or. If there is life in me.
El. What, art thou he?
Or. Look here upon this seal That was my sire's, judge then if I speak true.

El. O blissful day!
Or. Blissful, my heart attests!
El. Voice, art thou come?
Or. Come back, the voice replies.
El. Home to my arms come back?
Or. My home henceforth.
El. O all ye women, my neighbours and good friends,
Look on this man Orestes, who was feigned
Dead, and by feigning is alive again.
Chor. We see him, daughter; and for this happy chance
My eyes run over with excess of joy.
El. Dearest to me of all men ever born,
This hour come back to find—
Come back to see—me whom thy heart desired!
Or. Yes, I am come; but for awhile keep silence.
El. What fearest thou?
Or. Silence is best, lest those within should hear.
El. Nay but, by maiden Artemis,
I shall not stoop to fear the women there,
The stay-at-homes, vain cumberers of the house.
Or. But yet take note, that even in breasts of women
May Ares lodge; as thou too well hast proved.
El. Alas and woe is me!
Thy words find out my sorrow,
Not to be hidden, not to be done away,
That never its own burthen can forget.
Or. Sister, I know; but, when occasion bids,
These things must then be thought on; now, forbear.
El. All time, all time for me
Is present time and fit
To speak—and speak the truth:
For scarcely now my tongue at last is free.
Or. And so think I; therefore remember this.
El. What must I do?

Or. Wait; and while time is short, let words be few.
El. But how, when I have found
Thee, is it fit, that speech
For silence I should change—
Now, having seen thee, whom to see
Seemed once past thought or hope?
Or. Then didst thou see me, when heav'n bade me come.
El. Yea, for this boon beside, and best of all,
That heaven hath brought thee home,
Thank heaven, say I, for this.
Or. Loth am I to restrain thy joy; but yet
This overmuch rejoicing moves my fear.
El. Absent so long, but now, when time was ripe,
Returned, O glad return, to bless my sight—
Oh see what I have borne,
And do not, do not now——
Or. What must I not?
El. Not take from me, nor bid me yet forgo,
The comfort of thy face.
Or. Unmoved, I could not see another do it.
El. Dost thou consent?
Or. How could I not?
El. O friends, the voice is in my ears,
I had not hoped to hear.
[Thou wouldst not come, they said:]
And I refrained my speech,
And heard and answered not,
Unhappy. But I have thee now:
Now thy dear face hath shined on me—
Thy face, which not in darkest days
Could I again forget.
Or. All superfluity of words let go,
And neither tell me of my mother's sins,
Nor how Aegisthus drains my father's house,

And spills and spends at random all its wealth.
Such tale might well forbid all count of time.
But tell me now, what suits the present hour,
Where if we hide, or by appearing where,
Our enemies' mirth our coming shall confound:
And have a care thy mother note thee not
With thy glad face, when we are come within:
But, as for that false tale of dire mischance,
Let thy tears flow. Not until all is well,
Shall our rejoicing or our smiles be free.

El. Nay, brother, but, even as it pleases thee,
So also will I do: for all my joy
I gat not for myself, but gat from thee.
Nor would I choose to grieve thee ne'er so little,
Myself to win great gain; for so but ill
Fortune, that now befriends us, should I serve.
But, what comes next, thou knowest. Hast thou not heard
Aegisthus is not now within the house,
Only thy mother? and fear not thou that she
Will see my face lighted with joyful smiles.
For my inveterate hate sticks deep in me;
Nor shall I since thy coming have had time
To dry my gladsome tears. Must I not weep,
I who have seen thee in this one day come home,
Dead and alive? O most bewildering change!
Stood now my sire before me as he lived,
I should not deem it strange, but should believe.
Now therefore, wondrously as thou art come,
Command me as thou wilt: since I alone
Of two things had not failed; for either nobly
I should have saved myself, or nobly died.

Chor. Keep silence; for I hear steps at the door
Of some one coming out.

El. So, friends, go in;

Bearing withal a gift that may not be
Rejected—no, nor yet a welcome gift.
Ped. O ye most foolish and of sense bereft—
What, do ye tender now your lives so cheap,
Or are of native prudence so devoid—
When now ye stand, not on the brink of danger,
But in the peril's midst, and do not know it?
Nay, had not I kept watch here all the time
Close by the doors, your business would have been
About the house ere you yourselves were there:
But I bestowed the caution that ye lacked.
And now of many words make brief dispatch,
And of this noisy and insatiate joy,
And enter quick: for in such work as this
To linger is to lose; this craves dispatch.
Or. And having entered—can I then proceed?
Ped. You can: secure, that you are known to none.
Or. I think that you have told them of my death.
Ped. You in the house are numbered with the dead.
Or. Is this glad news to them? how took they it?
Ped. I'll tell thee that to end with; as it is.
All that they do is well, although not well.
El. I pray you, brother, tell me, who is this?
Or. You know him not?
El. I know not, nor can guess.
Or. Do you not know to whom you gave me once?
El. What say you? who?
Or. He who, as you devised,
Conveyed me hence to Phocis in his arms.
El. Can this be he, whom when my sire was slain
Alone of all men I found faithful still?
Or. 'Tis even he: be brief and ask no more.
El. O kindly light, and one deliverer
Of Agamemnon's house, how came you here?

And are you he who saved us at the worst?
O dearest hands, O thou whose feet were sweet
And serviceable, how hast thou talked with me
Unknown and undiscovered, and thy words
Did slay me, but thy deeds were sweet to me?
Hail, father; for in my eyes thou seem'st no less:
All hail—and know that in this selfsame day
Thee most of men I hated and I loved.

Ped. Let this suffice: the story of the past—
Many revolving nights and days shall serve
To talk this over, and make all things plain.
But now why stand ye here? this is the time
For deeds; now Clytaemnestra is alone,
No man is now within; but, if ye loiter,
Bethink you that with these ye 'll have to fight,
And better men than these, no equal fight.

Or. Now, Pylades, not many words of us
This work should crave, but in the house forthwith
To enter, meet obeisance having paid
To the shrines of the gods, who keep my father's doors.

El. To these, Apollo, lend a gracious ear
To these and me, who oftentimes have thee
With suppliant hand entreated of my best;
And now, bright god, Apollo, of all I have
I pray thee, I entreat thee, I implore,
Oh prosper thou our handiwork to-day,
That men may know, when impious deeds are done,
From righteous heaven what retribution falls.

Chor. See there how step by step *strophe.*
Goes Ares to his work,
And from his nostrils breathes
Resistless slaughter forth.
Beneath the roof of the house ev'n now
The swift inevitable hounds are gone,

Following fast on the scent of sin:
Nor long the dream of my heart shall tarry,
Hovering doubtfully.
For now the avenger of the slain *antistrophe.*
With stealthy pace into the house
Follows as he is led—
The ancient stately halls of his father enters—
With keen-edged murder in his hands:
And Hermes, son of Maia, leads him in,
Who with concealment wraps him round,
And to his goal conducts him straight,
And tarries not.

El. O dearest women, while I speak, ev'n now
They are about it: but in silence wait.

Chor. Say, how? what do they now?

El. She decks the urn
For burial, and they stand over her.

Chor. Why came you forth?

El. I must keep watch, for fear
Without our knowing Aegisthus should come in.

Clyt. (*within*) Alas!—O house
Void of all friends and full of murderers!

El. Some one in the house cries out. Friends, do ye hear?

Chor. I heard and shuddered, and shut my ears for horror.

Clyt. Ah woe is me! Aegisthus, where art thou?

El. Again one cries, and loudly.

Clyt. O son, my son,
Have pity on thy mother.

El. But not from thee
Did this thy son find pity, nor his sire.

Chor. O city, O hapless house,
The fate that dogged thee day by day,

Is dying, is dying now!

Clyt. Ah, I am stricken.

El. Strike, if thou canst, again.

Clyt. Ah me again!

El. Would that it were 'Ah for Aegisthus' too!

Chor. The curse fulfils itself: the dead live still.
They who were slain long since
Drain from the slayer the blood
Ordained for blood to flow.
Lo here come they, with hands
Blood-red, that reek of sacrifice
To Ares, so as no words can tell.

El. Orestes, how have ye sped?

Or. Here in the house
Well, if Apollo's oracle spake well.

El. Dead is the guilty one?

Or. Fear not henceforth
Thy mother's pride shall flout thee any more.

Chor. Cease, for I see Aegisthus full in view.

El. Rash boys, will ye not back?

Or. Where see ye him?

El. From the suburbs of the city, lo in our power—
He comes, exulting.

Chor. For the vestibule
Make with what speed ye may; that, having now
Bestowed the first work well, so may ye this.

Or. Fear not: we shall not fail.

El. Haste, where thou'rt going.

Or. See, I am gone.

El. What's here, belongs to me.

Chor. In this man's ear a few
Soft words were not amiss:
That he may blindly close
And grapple with his doom.

Aeg. Which of all you knows of the Phocian strangers,
Who, as I hear, came hither to announce
Orestes slain amidst the chariots wrecked?
You there, 'tis you shall tell me: you who were
So bold before: methinks it should concern
You most; you best should know, and tell me this.
El. I know; else were I careless of the woes
Of her who is of all my friends to me
Most near.
Aeg. Then tell me where they are.
El. In the house:
To the heart of their hostess they found their way.
Aeg. Do they in very truth report his death?
El. No mere report they bring, but show him dead.
Aeg. May then my eyes inform me of the truth?
El. They may indeed, and 'tis a sorry sight.
Aeg. Such joyful greetings you are not wont to give.
El. Of this your joyful news I give you joy.
Aeg. But now be silent, and throw wide the gates,
And let all Argos and Mycenae see
That whoso buoyed themselves with empty hopes
Of this man's life, now seeing he is dead,
May take my bit in their mouths, and not perforce
Get wisdom, getting chastisement from me.
El. Forthwith my part is done; for now at last
I have learnt to do the bidding of my betters.
Aeg. Zeus, 'twas thy wrath whereby this sight befell:
But be the word unsaid, if it offends.
Take off the face-cloth from the face; this life
Was near to mine, and claims some grief from me.
Or. Lift it thyself: thine office this, not mine,
To look, and speak kind speech to what lies here.
Aeg. Well said, and as you say I'll do: meanwhile
Go call me Clytaemnestra through the house.

Or. She is beside thee: look not far off for her.
Aeg. What sight is this?
Or. So scared? Is the face strange?
Aeg. Who are the men, into whose net I have
Thus helpless fallen?
Or. Hast thou not yet discerned,
Thou dost accost the living as the dead?
Aeg. Ah—so I read thy riddle. Orestes surely—
He and no other it is, who speaks to me.
Or. So wise a prophet, and yet fooled so long?
Aeg. Oh lost, undone! Yet suffer me to speak
A word, no more.
El. In heaven's name, my brother,
Let him say no word more, nor waste the time,
Talking. When men must grapple with their fate,
What gain of time to one condemned to die?
But straightway slay him, and fling his body forth
To find such burial as 'tis meet it should
Out of our sight. For this and nothing else
For all my wrongs of old can make amends.
Or. With speed get thee within: the issue now
For thee is not of words, but of thy life.
Aeg. What need of darkness, if this deed is fair?
Why lead me in, not strike at once and here?
Or. Dictate not, but come with me where thou slewest
Our father, that ev'n there thy blood may flow.
Aeg. Is it ordained these walls must see all woes
O' the house of Pelops, now and in time to come?
Or. Thine must they: perfect prophet am I of that.
Aeg. The art you boast derives not from your father.
Or. You bandy words; our going is delayed:
Set forth.
Aeg. Lead, you.
Or. 'Tis you must go the first.

Aeg. Lest I should fly from *thee?*
Or. Rather lest thou
Shouldst choose the fashion of thy death. I needs
Must keep death's bitterness, perfect for thee.
Would that, for all, this justice tarried not;
Whoever dares to deal in lawless deeds,
For that man, death. So should not crimes abound.
Chor. O house of Atreus, how from all thy griefs.
Now into freedom's light thou hast leapt at last,
Crowned by this day's emprise! 1510

NOTES TO ELECTRA

5. *Io, frenzied maid.* Io was the daughter of the River-god Inachus, the first priestess of Hera. As she was loved by Zeus she caused jealousy in Hera, and Hera turned her into a cow, perpetually stung by a gadfly which drove her over the world in frenzied wanderings.

7. *Place Lyceian.* The temple of Apollo, so called as slayer of wolves, because he was the guardian of flocks.

147–8. *messenger of Zeus . . . Itys.* The nightingale. This is a very perplexing legend from the different ways in which it has been related. Pandion, king of Attica, had two daughters, Philomela and Procne. The story is that Tereus, a king of the Thracians, after marrying Procne, by whom he became father of Itys, fell in love with Philomela, and having seduced her, cut out her tongue that she might not tell what he had done. Procne then came to Philomela and killed her own son Itys, taking further vengeance by placing the flesh of Itys in a dish before Tereus, and then flying with Philomela. Tereus pursued them with an axe, and when they were overtaken by him they prayed the Gods to turn them into birds, so Procne became a nightingale, Philomela a swallow, though some legends reverse this, making Philomela a nightingale, and Procne a swallow.

180. Crisa is a seaport town on a spur of Parnassus about two miles from Delphi, and was sacred to Apollo.

425. *the Sun-god.* Helios. The Sun, and so the Sun-god.

509. *Sank Myrtilus.* Oenomaus, king of Pisa in Elis, had a beautiful daughter, Hippodameia, whose hand he promised to the suitor who should defeat him in a chariot race; but the suitor who was beaten by him in the race was to be put to death. Pelops entered as a candidate, having previously bribed Myrtilus, the charioteer of Oenomaus, to leave out the linch-pins, one or both, by which the naves of the wheels were fastened to the axles. By this stratagem Pelops won the race and the prize. But fearing lest Myrtilus should betray his secret he threw him into the sea, and as the poor wretch sank, he cursed Pelops and his house.

645. *lord Lyceius.* Apollo.

835–6. *King Amphiaraus . . . snares of women.* Son of Oileus and Hypermnestra, a famous chief, seer, and prophet, and the husband of Eriphyle, the sister of Adrastus king of Argos. On marrying her he had sworn to abide by her decision in any difference between himself and Adrastus. When Polynices was enlisting

Argive aid against Thebes, Amphiaraus wished to refuse because he foresaw that the Argives would be defeated. But Polynices bribed Eriphyle with a golden necklace to persuade her husband to join the alliance; he did so and perished, a miracle attending his death: for after the defeat of the Argives, when he was being pursued by the hero Polyclimenus to the Ismenus, Zeus cleft the earth in sunder and Amphiaraus, chariot and all, was swallowed up.

843-7. *The murderess . . . champion.* Eriphyle. The champion was Alcmaeon, the son of Amphiaraus, who returned to Argos after his father's death and slew Eriphyle.

1064. *heavenly Themis.* Daughter of Uranus and wedded to Zeus; she is fabled to have given birth to 'the true season' ἀληθείας ὥρας. She is the Goddess of just counsel enthroned beside Zeus, and so, as Professor Jebb notes, there is a twofold fitness in her invocation here; she is at once the embodiment of time and justice, and she will bring, in its proper season, vengeance.

1077. *her sire.* Tereus.

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